This Month:

GERTRUDE DIAMANT is the author of a novel, *Labyrinth,* and has contributed reviews to the metropolitan press. *The Bloodletting* is part of a new novel dealing with the relief set-up.

IRVING FINEMAN has practiced engineering in this country and in Canada. He has published three novels: *This Pure Young Man, Lovers Must Learn,* and *Hear Ye Sons;* also short stories, verse, and literary criticism. At present he is teaching at Bennington College, Vt.

KENNETH REXROTH has contributed poems to most of the experimental magazines and appeared in the Objectivists' anthology. He lives in San Francisco.

JESSE STUART, who lives in Taylor, Kentucky, has recently emerged as the poet of a new region in American literature. He is the author of a volume of sonnets, *Man with a Bull Tongue Plow,* and a book of short stories, *Head O' W-Hollow,* which is reviewed in this issue by Ben Field.

LOUIS ARAGON is one of the best known revolutionary writers in France. He is the author of several volumes of poetry and a novel, *The Bells of Basle,* which will soon be published in an English translation. Formerly one of the leading surrealists, he is now the editor of *Commune,* central organ of left literature in Paris.

JOHN MULLEN's sketches of steel workers have been published in the *New Masses, American Spectator,* and other periodicals. His *Mushrooms in the Foundry* appeared in the reportage section of the anthology, *Proletarian Literature in the United States.*

NATHAN ASCH, author of *The Office, The Valley,* and other novels, is a frequent contributor to PARTISAN REVIEW & ANVIL.

JAMES T. FARRELL's most recent book, *A Note on Literary Criticism,* is the subject of an article by Alan Calmer in this issue.

NEWTON ARVIN is at present writing a book on Walt Whitman. His *Letter on Proletarian Literature* in our February number was much commented upon by readers.

HAROLD ROSENBERG has written critical articles and reviews for various literary magazines.

Announcement:

As the plan of PARTISAN REVIEW & ANVIL is to publish ten issues a year, the magazine will not appear in July and August. Taking advantage of this interval, the editors intend to work out a program of enlarging the magazine and broadening its appeal. The September number will contain several pieces of unusual interest.

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Partisan Review & Anvil

JUNE
1936

The Bloodletting

GERTRUDE DIAMANT

PETE CARNEY used to be a driver for a trucking place just around the corner from 4 Thompson . . . twenty years of it, and after there was no work for him, he'd still go into the place every morning and stand there and shout: Well, how's the rush? Only there wasn't any rush . . . only a couple of sour bosses, sitting around with their feet on the desk, gloomy, digging toothpicks into their teeth.

Then Pete stayed home and tried to figure out what hit him. He sat at the window all day, huddled up as though he was sick, trying to figure out. He said the trouble was, goods weren't moving. He said the trouble was, the niggers came up from the South with their own trucks and grabbed off the business. They didn't have any expenses or any families, and they just slept in the trucks at night and grabbed off the business cheap. He said he'd like to have one of them under his hands, they ought to be beaten up and run out of the state.

Pete's a short man with steel-hard arms, short and square-built, no strength wasted in gaining height. They had him down in the relief office for a wife-beater. He did give his wife one shiner, and it worried him. He used to say, God forgive him, it was the only blow he ever gave the missus in twenty-five years of married life. It happened on the day she went to the relief office and came home with the application. He didn't want her to go, and it was practically like telling him she'd given up hope he would support her again, the way he did for twenty-five years of married life. And not being able to deny it, he got sore and loosed his fist on her; and, God forgive him, he was sorry the minute it happened. So the relief people had it in for Pete, especially because his wife is such a poor-looking thing, a woman who has to fight for breath when she climbs the stairs, making sounds as if she's choking and crying. To hear her, you'd think it's a dog coming up, spent and winded, with its tongue lolling out.

Then there are the two sons, both taller than their father. Tom, the older, almost a six-footer. Vincent is shorter, but he's still a good head above Pete. Most of their growing was done in prosperity. When the lean times came, it couldn't change the length and breadth of bone on them, but their bodies can't make enough flesh. They're tall fellows, but shamefully thin.

In their twenties . . . young men without work, sitting around all day like useless things, hands hanging empty between slack knees. It was seeing red for Pete, when he saw them sitting that way. Supper time, he'd rise at the table and shout for them to get out. They didn't know what started him. They didn't know, and they knew . . . how it was eating on him all day, his anger, his defeat. How he had to vomit it out or it would choke him.

Tom, the older, wouldn't take it. Whose fault, he would shout back, whose fault! Starting up and spinning his chair back, swearing he wouldn't come to table any more, he'd eat in the kitchen, where the old man's eyes wouldn't be on him, poisoning his mouthfuls. Swearing he'd go off on the road, because home was a place that didn't want him any more, and they would know he was alive only by the picture-post-cards coming from way out in the west somewhere. Then, because his mother's face was turned toward him, because her eyes were on him with their hang-dog sadness, he would sit down again and draw his plate to him, and mutter away the rest of his anger.

But Vin, the younger, only smiled and sat with his hands in his pockets, shoulders squared easy against the back of his chair. Smiled and looked at his father. There were certain things in this world that Vin knew. About himself. Take the weight of him, the reach, the measure of biceps flexed and unflexed, the measure of chest expanded and chest normal—take those figures and add them together, and what do you get? A fellow with the born build of a lightweight, a natural, a guy who might be a second Canzoneri. Hell yes, it was depression and all that, but you couldn't sit around moping. There were times that couldn't be better, made you forget all the days of looking for work, tramping the streets until you're leg-weary and sick to the stomach to hear the big boss-mouths dropping out the same old crap. After the workout, for instance . . . when he stood under the shower and felt the water quenching the fire under his skin, until his skin was marble-cool and hard, and to move was light as flying. And Tom Prenty standing there and telling him how lousy his lead was, and next time to listen, for God's sake, and lead only with his left. So Vin would sit there, looking at his father and smiling, and think how the ringside seats might hit fifteen or more, and his father sitting first-row and hating to remember the times like these.

There was a year's difference between the two of

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them, too close a space. They grew against each other like teeth grinding together, each shaping the other. Vin, quick to smile, easygoing. Tom, a sort of sour puss, God-knows-what eating on him, maybe thinking that Vin was crowding him out. Especially after Vin got a job. Three months of relief, and then the investigator comes with a job—pick and shovel, twelve a week, and offers it to the three of them, Pete and the two sons. And Vin saying, Sure, why not? A fellow gets flabby sitting on his hams all day. And Pete saying, Thank God, to get the stink of relief out of the house. Only Tom wanting something better, because he fancied himself a brainy guy with a white-collar neck. In the year's head-start that he had over his brother, Tom learned something. He was a young man going somewhere, knew what it was to work and have his girl. He was a young man going somewhere . . . walking the street in the pride of a white collar, in his hair a fine drug-store smell, none of your shop smells about him. Walking down the street and going to see his girl. Then came depression, and he wasn't going anywhere any more. He was standing on the corner with the other punks . . . the guys who didn't say, Let's go, because there was no goddamn place to go. The guys who said, It's a racket, and It's a lousy break, and It's a raw deal. Inheritors of the lousy break and raw deal. They were wondering what they were born for, and what they were living for, and what the girls on the block were for . . . no money even to take a girl to the movies to a dark place, where you can feel what she's like under her dress.

Tom went to the relief people and asked for a job, and the man told him it was no use. One job to a family.

Tom said: One job to a family, it don't make sense. There's seven of us.

The man said, Too bad, seven's too many.

Too many, for sure. The three kids had to sleep together, all in one bed, like a tangle of snakes. And Mrs. Carney, thanking her stars every time Pete didn't take her, and blessing the choking fits because they made him want her less. Because she wasn't sure yet if a baby could still take root in her or not. Maybe it couldn't any more. She'd starve it inside of her first. Because there was no room in the house for another one, and no money to get it born, and not a crumb of extra food at table. The stink of relief was out of the house, but who'd say they were better off? Because the landlord came, as if it was prosperity again, and asked for the whole rent. And Pete learned, the way they all did in 4 Thompson, that you can deal with the belly, you can cheat it here and there; but you can't cheat the roof and the four walls. You're in the place or out of it. They managed to keep their furniture off the street, but hunger was a shame they all knew, each one secretly to himself. When they sat at table, they were silent, eating as if it was a serious business—like animals at a trough, who know there's a stern master somewhere watching the food closely.

Tom tried to make sense of it, day after day. And meanwhile, Vincent was working, growing small first-of-the-crop muscles on his thin arms. At least Vin was living, his pocket lined with the pay envelope every week, throwing the money down on the table every pay-day with a gesture that Tom hated. Tom got so he wouldn't talk to his brother. He fenced himself round with silence when Vin was there, looked at his brother with eyes from which hatred shot like a whip. And so things stood between them, until the trouble started over Tom's girl, and there was the night of the big scene when Tom didn't care what he shouted.

II

That day, Annette went out . . . red lip-smear slashing her face, made up to kill. She draws her coat tight to her body, flaunting lean hips to the eyes of men. Last year's coat and hat, cast-off shoes. Her feet are cold and unlovely, slopping on the sidewalk in shoes not their own.

She curses the sun because there's no warmth in it, because it's warm. Warm and giving life to the thing that grows inside of her. She curses this life, now three months old. Curses the fulness of her breast and the hard blossoming of the nipples. Soon they'll see, talk among themselves, make sounds with their tongues. Soon they'll wonder who it is, rake their memories to comb out the name. She goes with Dan Anderson, she goes with Tom Carney. . . . Ah, the sly one, maybe she doesn't know herself. . . .

If she could pluck the baby out of her body, be empty as she was before. There is nothing to nourish it with, no flesh not needed to cover her bones, no blood in her that flows rich and strong. But the baby is stubborn, it feeds on her, and it grows . . . grows until they can't help seeing. Dan Anderson . . . Tom. Tom. . . . Dan Anderson. Go on, wonder till your brains burst. Who would want to be touched by Dan Anderson? With his pudgy body rubbing itself against you like a dog. . . .

She remembers how the doctor kept his hand on her longer than necessary. But there's nothing we can do, nothing. Spoke to her that way, as if being pregnant was an incurable disease. Then in the relief office. The thin face back of the desk had stared at her. It happens sometimes, the lips said, mechanically smiling. We can give you a dollar-twenty extra, that's if you're sure, if you're really sure. . . . The woman lowered her voice: there were women who pretended they were, and then when there was no baby to show, they said they fell down a flight of stairs and miscarried. There were women who would lie for that dollar-twenty. . . .

Here, Annette wanted to say, feel my breasts. Maybe you know how they change. She hated the woman at the desk. She wanted to lift her hand and strike her full in the face, on the lips that were too

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sallow and thin and withered for a man's mouth to want to touch them. But instead, she smiled and said thank you, and her father took the dollar-twenty each time and paid the back electricity bills.

She remembers the nurse at the health center. You ought to be ashamed, asking for milk. You have only one, not even one, and there are women with five and six children who need our milk. Don't you think they come first? Annette had answered quick then, flashed the words out like a slap in the face, until the nurse blushed clear up to the points of her little white cap. Wait . . . I'll go out and make more, if that's what you want. . . . How many did you say? Wait, I'll make you some more. . . .

It was an answer to remember. She would brag about it, some day in the future, when she had the baby. It's lying in the carriage under a pink blanket, and she's standing on the stoop, talking to the other girls. Wait, I says to her, I'll go out and make more, if that's what you want. And then she would laugh, the full belly-laugh that couldn't come out of her now.

She almost laughed now, walking in the cold street, with her hands burrowing into her coat-sleeves for warmth, holding the empty shopping-bag against her body. But this laughter was something to save, to store up in herself. She walked faster, and now she crossed the street, because the girl who was walking ahead of her crossed. Then she crossed again, because the girl crossed again. And then it happened, the girl turned around. He face was twisted, her mouth funneled like the muzzle of a pistol attacking. You're following me, trailing me to the place. The girl stood there, her mouth worked, but it only fired blanks. Then she turned around, walking faster, crossed the street and crossed again, like a crazy one.

Annette followed her, stubborn as an animal. Thinks maybe I'll lose the trail. But she was stubborn, because the thing that grew in her was stubborn.

Then they were going up the iron stairs together, and she shouldered herself in at the door, and the girl stood there, looking at the boss scared and ashamed, like when you step into a place and see that you've dragged in something foul from the streets.

He began to whine that they were bringing the law on him, they were landing him in jail. He filled their shopping bags with the labels, but telling them meanwhile they were lucky to get their twenty-five cents per thousand, only for God's sake to keep your mouths shut and don't tell anyone where you get it.

It's lousy, the girl said, friendly on the stairs going down. Twenty-five cents a thousand, and that's putting the string through the labels before you tie . . . fifty cents for a day's work. In a week, enough to buy shoes. . . .

In a week, enough to buy a layette for the baby, Annette figured, but only to herself.

Twenty-five cents per thousand, equals a half-day's work, equals fifty cents a day . . . she figured days into money, money into days, equal signs dancing in her head, like grinning mouths. She figured: in seven days, enough to buy a layette for the baby, to cover its nakedness when it comes; never enough to get rid of the thing, so it won't be born naked and hungry. She figured it out, climbing the stairs of 4 Thompson, and at the top was Tom. He startled her, prowling around in the shadow at the end of the hall.

His hands leaped up, engaged her shoulders.

"Jesus, honey, the house is empty, we missed hours alone. I'm waiting here hours. . . ."

But her body stiffened under his palms, and he brought his face close.

"Listen, honey, what's there to be afraid of? It's safe skating now. You can't get caught twice, one time after the other. Listen, honey."

And it had to be his way, because she was too tired to talk it out with him, and too lonely. Only she'd rather have had him quiet, giving her a comforting place in the crook of his arm, instead of tearing at her that way with the double haste of his need and his fear that someone might come.

When it was over, she found herself the comforting place she wanted in the crook of his arm, and she looked up at him, ashamed suddenly, covering her mouth with her hand.

"Do you mind it, Tom, my teeth being black this way? It's because when I was little, they gave me medicine, and my mother didn't know to give it with a glass tube."

He didn't mind it, not enough to be serious. "I don't mind it, honey, I love you. Teeth fall out, anyway."

"The baby's teeth will be good."

"We'll feed the kid with a glass tube, with a silver spoon. It won't take after its ma. It'll have big white grinders, like me."

"Where you going to get the silver spoon, smarty?"

He told her, Never mind, leave it to him.

She remembered about the women who faked they were pregnant, so they could get the extra dollar-twenty from the relief. He asked her what in hell was she doing with the money, she ought to be getting extra milk and start fattening up.

"Look," she said, "we got the juice turned on for it."

She told him the old man was beginning to look at her sideways, boring into her with his eyes.

He said he didn't give a damn, she could tell the old man she was carrying Tom Carney's brat. She could promise him wedding bells. But she looked at him sharply, withdrawing, suddenly wanting her body to herself. "Talk's cheap," she said, and sat apart from him, warming the bitterness in her.

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"What can I do, honey, what can I do. . . . " That was his way, whenever she was angry, to send his voice fawning to her. "I know I'm no bargain, I'm no big-shot from the department of sanitation, a guy with a steady income, pulling down his forty a week just for rubber-stamping papers, like Dan Anderson. There's no future ahead of me, that's a cinch. But what right has your father got kicking, when he's living off the city like the rest of us? We're all in the same boat, and the boat leaks. If he don't like me for a son-in-law, let him grab himself a better guy. Only he'll have some long looking to do, finding a fellow on the block who's getting more than his few dollars from the drivers, or from running errands for the bookies. Look, sweetheart, you know I'm raving to work."

Still she kept herself from him. He moved closer and touched her arm timidly, filled the room with big talk.

"Look," he told her, "you've got to understand, everything's a racket. There's the dirty end and the clean end of everything, but so far, it's only the dirty end for us on Thompson Street. Look at the food depot . . . sacks of potatoes rotting away, and have to be kerosened to take the stink out of them. But they won't give you a pound more than the ticket says, so the guys who work there can take what's extra. Look at the church. They come to your door for money, they're right in line with landlord and gas man. It's just another racket, turn any way you want, it's all a racket, these days. So I figure, the only thing to do is grab off a racket of my own. I'm figuring to get my cut of something. I'm figuring to grab off my share of something, I don't know what, because I see there's no headway just watching your step.

"Listen, honey. . . . "

But she moved her shoulders impatiently, to shake off his male talk. She told him, maybe he'd better watch his step, or the kid wouldn't know its father . . . she'd be telling it lies, to hide that he was in jail. He didn't say anything then, only searched in his mind for something cheerful to say, and there was nothing to say. The room grew dark, and in the dark she suffered herself to be stroked, but making her flesh passive as stone.

On the stairs, Tom met her old man. He was coming up with a load of wood, and he looked up slyly from under it. When he saw who it was, his eyes jumped. He passed Tom without speaking.

Tom could hear the old man entering the flat, and how he tumbled the wood down on the floor—and how his wrath tumbled out at the same time, like another burden that he couldn't carry any more. Heard the names he called Annette, and Annette shrilling back at him to shut up, or she would shout the whole thing from the housetops. Then there was only the sound of their voices, and he knew she was telling him, Never mind. Never mind, it was Tom Carney's brat, all right, and he'd father it, with wedding bells and everything. Tom waited, hating the old man who had no right to kick, living off the city like the rest. Then he went down softly to the third floor, and decided it was time to tell Pete about Annette and himself.

They were sitting in darkness, one candle burning on the bureau near the statue of St. Agnes under glass. Tom knew when he came in that there was something strange in the room, stranger than the darkness even, and then he understood. There was no radio going. They were cut off from light and from sound, eating in silence and in darkness.

Tom thought he'd give it to them easy. "Jesus, what kind of a funeral d'you call this—whose funeral is it, anyway? Listen. What's the idea of holding a funeral like this, when I come to announce a wedding?"

But they didn't get it. He fooled around for a while, and then he told them point-blank he was going to mary Annette Deleo. Believe it or not, take it or leave it . . . he added that quickly, when he saw his father's face.

Vin laughed outright. His mother stood across from him at the table, holding the plate halfway, not looking at Pete. What a habit she had lately, of sighing. In the morning, when she got up and flopped through the rooms in her loose slippers, she sighed all the time, as if the day was a burden being fastened to her. And she sighed when she went to sleep, like someone being unyoked from a chafing harness. His mother stood there, as if waiting for the blow. But Pete lifted himself slowly, took time to plant his fists on the table. Tom watching him and thinking how the Mussolini act was starting, and hating the old man's guts, because he made such a fuss—maybe wanting a fellow to mope around like a nutted dog, because he had no job.

"What's the idea," Tom said, whining to Pete. "What's the idea regarding me like a criminal? Where's the crime, to get married? Maybe it happened before in this house. . . . "

But Pete didn't hear him, he began softly.

Said Tom was his own boss, he could walk out on them and get married, he was his own boss. He could go down to City Hall any day he wanted, no one could stop him. It was past the time when a father had any say.

Maybe it was a good thing, after all, Pete said. He'd struggled to support his family for twenty-five years of married life, and it was a struggle. Now let Tom be the one, let him learn what it is to have a family on his back. He saw it coming, Pete said. Saw how Tom was rattling around, and the old saying was right . . . give a man enough rope, he'll hang himself. So if Tom was so fixed he had to marry, welcome to it. He could just walk out on them, there was nobody could stop him.

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Only, Pete said, don't come whining to me for help. If you figure you can marry on a shoestring, welcome to it. Only you're a sucker for trouble, that's all. Marry and go on relief, Pete said. I couldn't do it, myself. I'm too proud of myself, I'm too ashamed of myself. I'm ashamed of myself, how they'll be talking on the block . . . that Pete Carney's son walked out on his father and went and got married and went and got relief with the other bums. A fellow that's no cripple, nothing wrong with his two hands to find himself work. I couldn't do it, I'm too proud of myself, I'm too ashamed of myself. If I had two young hands on me this day, there's no power on earth could stop me from working . . . only I'm old, there's too many youngsters edging me out. It's a year now I've been sitting at the window, figuring myself sick. A measly twelve a week. You've got to stretch it twenty ways, and still there's nothing for light and for coal and for shoes. And every month wondering if they'll throw you on the street. Well, I said, Tom's looking. Tom's out looking for work, he'll find something, soon we'll be in the feedbag again. Sat there like a fool, figuring I had a son, he'd help get me on my feet again. And then he walks in. . . .

It's coming Tom thought, it's coming. Christ, all the cuffing around. . . .

In the moment that Pete lifted his fist and crashed it down on the table so that the dishes jumped, Tom saw the three scared faces of the kids, and Vin turning the radio dials with a worried look, the way a doctor looks, examining you, and his mother standing with her head on one side, foolish-looking.

Christ, he thought, all the cuffing around . . . day after day, eating with them, and the old man poisoning my mouthfuls. And then it's a crime if you want to marry, be your age and marry like the other fellows that got their piece. Whoever it was cuffing him around, he'd like to give it back to him, measure for measure and flowing over. Whoever it was. . . . His muscles leaped under his skin, his fists tightened. He knew it was fight. He wanted to knead yielding flesh with his fists, to strike until the blood-juice spurted out.

"Get out," Pete shouted. "Lift your backside out of here, so I can say I told you get out. . . . "

Get out, get out, get out. . . . Tom didn't hear any more, only the words were in his head, over and over, like a record when the needle jams. And then he saw his fist fly from him, and Pete was falling back, with a hand to his face, feeling himself curiously and looking at the blood on his fingers, and patting himself like trying to pat the blood back into place.

They didn't know if he was going to cry. He sat there, and he started mumbling about Tom all over again, only half-crying this time. And there was one thing he couldn't stop saying, looking at each of them, as if no one would believe him. "I couldn't do it myself," he said. "I'm too proud of myself, I'm too ashamed of myself."

Then he got up and went into the bedroom and shut the door. They heard him opening the bureau drawers and dumping things, looking for God-knows-what.

His mother made the kids get out of the room. They went softly, and Vin went too. He said it was no use staying for the end of the funeral . . . the old man was a fool, and Tom was another, not understanding how to handle him. Tom said, What the hell, you couldn't take everything. It was strange, speaking to his brother, and he hated the way Vin walked out, like saying it was all a mess but he was clean of it.

Then they were alone, and his mother started piling the dishes. She looked gray in the face, and for once she wasn't sighing. She cut bread for Tom and brought him water, and shoved the plateful toward him. "Eat," she said reproachfully. "Eat."

Down with "Leftism"!

ALAN CALMER

IN THE first few pages of this book,* Farrell puts his finger on a basic error of modern criticism, typified by impressionism on the one hand and by literary Humanism on the other. As he shows, the first critical method has denied the purposive or "functional" aspect of literature, while the second has ignored the esthetic side.

After disposing quickly of these two extremes of recent bourgeois criticism, he turns to revolutionary criticism in the United States. He is concerned chiefly with a tendency that was first characterized, I believe, in *Partisan Review* as "leftism"—the term being used, of course, in the sense Lenin used it in 1920, when he wrote about the "infantile disorder" of " 'left-wing' Communism". Farrell finds this tendency in Marxian critical writing to be guilty of the same type of extremism committed by Babbitt, More and Company. "And since it is an extremism hitched to a progressive force—whereas literary Humanism is tied to a regressive one—it requires correction."

Farrell examines a number of the concepts which reflect this point of view. He assails the way in which the function of literature has frequently been confused with the purpose of direct action. He criticizes

* *A Note On Literary Criticism*, by James T. Farrell. Vanguard Press. $2.50.

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the writers who separate Marxian interpretation from esthetic judgment and who superimpose one upon the other, instead of developing an organic critical system. He demonstrates that great literary works have a "relatively inherent persistence-value" over and above their social usefulness. He denounces the critics who "fly the banner of Marxism" but who still conceive of the relationship between economics and ideology as a "straight equation, one leading head-on into the other." He shows that the problem of finding a relevant tradition is more than a matter of searching for writers who were Marxists, but of assimilating usable elements in past culture. He points out that the terms "proletarian" and "bourgeois" as applied to literature are not, in themselves, terms of merit or value, but are simply descriptive.

He does an excellent job in the chapter on "Individualism and the Class Struggle," exploding a popular myth: "Because a novel happens to deal with the particular predicament of a particular man or woman in a particular period of time, it does not necessarily follow that it is tainted with individualism," he says with characteristic bluntness; "nor does it necessarily follow that it belongs in a lower category than the collective novel; nor is it necessarily implied that the novelist has failed to understand the working of social forces and social influences." Equally important is the chapter on "Literature and Propaganda," which is perhaps the first adequate, balanced presentation of this subject to be found in American criticism; it should be required reading for every reader, student and writer of proletarian literature.

In spite of its title and its too modest foreword, this book is more than a mere "note" on literary criticism. True, it is far from being a complete esthetic, or even a thoroughgoing contribution toward a philosophy of literature; it is deeply involved in immediate issues and is written at a polemical heat; yet it is the first lengthy statement of a critical stand that must, I firmly believe, become the dominant emphasis of Marxian criticism if proletarian literature in the United States is to grow instead of stagnate. For the critical position represented by Farrell is not solely destructive; in place of the vulgar practices of "leftism" which he demolishes, Farrell stresses the importance of literary and human values in dealing with central social experience. Thus his book is itself a sign of the growth of revolutionary literature. It is, I think, one of the first road-signs indicating that American proletarian letters is en route to a more expansive and fertile territory which promises to yield richer harvests.

I am not sure, however, that the book will be regarded in this manner, particularly in view of its scathing criticism of so many prominent leftwing critics. I suspect that some will call it "pure" estheticism. Some may even damn it as "menshevism" or "revisionism." Others will probably assure us they were always for the principles which Farrell advocates, while they will continue in practice to violate them. These objections will, in all likelihood, be matched on the other side by dishonest penmen who make a racket out of sniping at revolutionary writing, and who will probably "interpret" Farrell's diagnosis of an internal ailment as an external attack upon proletarian literature.

Distortions of the latter type aren't worth bothering about. Many of the best talents in American letters are working within revolutionary culture—and just as many more are moving in the same general direction. Proletarian literature has become an entire movement, has already passed through several stages of literary and social struggle. The fundamental task of Marxian criticism today is not to waste time in philippics directed at unprincipled enemies; its main function is to do its part in creating an atmosphere where literary talent will have the best chance to breathe and grow.

More damaging are criticisms of the first kind. They are usually made, with the best of intentions, by irresponsible critics who bog our literature with notions that become gospel to many writers and readers; and which compel other critics to expend their energies trying to drain these swamps instead of preparing a firmer soil for literary effort. In inveighing against the functional extremism of these critics, Farrell may seem to be too dogmatic; but if he argues with so much conviction it is largely because he is attacking a dogma.

What Farrell's book does reveal is a sense of direct and clear thinking—a rare gift not only for a "creative" author but for the kind of critic whose lack of ideas leads him to fall into easy formulas, like some of the oversimplified beliefs which Farrell dismembers. This ability to handle intellectual concepts is apparent in numerous footnotes and parenthetical remarks, as well as in the central thesis of his book—which is a reservoir for all sorts of acute observations, culled from a fair amount of reading and thinking, although not entirely germane to the main thread of Farrell's argument. This critical equipment should help to explain how the author of *Judgment Day* was able to preserve the inner consistency of his character, Studs Lonigan, avoiding the variety of wish-fulfillment which has punctured a good deal of leftwing fiction.

In his *Note on Literary Criticism* Farrell is concerned largely with the vestiges of a narrow, anti-esthetic attitude in proletarian literature today. He does not deal with the origins and development of this trend in Marxian literary thought. This is an important omission. If he had filled this gap, Farrell would have given us a more thorough understanding of the subject; and he would at the same time have

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made a more severe indictment of the slurring-over of esthetic values which still persists in leftwing criticism.

A genetic and historical study of this sort would have to trace the relationship of a number of factors whose effect is very devious. It would have to prove, it seems to me, that the "leftist" emphasis in American Marxist criticism did not arise very consciously out of a set of thought-out principles, but rather out of a lack of them. I mean that it was, on the subjective side, a lack of thinking which caused, and still causes, revolutionary critics to blunder into the kind of functional extremism Farrell attacks.

Even today a consistent "leftist" school of writing, fighting consciously for a definite set of values, might encourage a specific type of proletarian literature, which would be diametrically opposed to other proletarian schools and would stimulate a more spirited clash of literary beliefs—always a sign of intellectual health. But American "leftism" has never possessed even the virtue of internal consistency. Writers who are identified with this approach have succumbed to a blind empiricism; they have swung from one extreme of their position to the other: their political evaluation of literature has extended from literary praise of the most mediocre writers who eulogize the revolutionary workingclass, to political approval of the most "successful" authors whose sympathies are remote from the workingclass movement. "Left" extremism has usually been the outcome of over-simplified thinking—the worst possible guide through the winding, swerving paths of art.

No more telling charge could be made against this critical, or rather non-critical, outlook than its intellectual inability to resist the spontaneous currents of its time and achieve some degree of balance. To a considerable extent it was the failure of revolutionary critics to check the natural flow of social and literary tendencies, which led to the victory of "leftism." Thus, the sharp turn against pure esthetic swung proletarian writers to the other edge of the road, to a variety of what Farrell calls functional extremism. This loss of control could have been prevented only by a genuine sense of critical perspectives. In addition to this sudden change within literature itself, the alliance of writers with a direct political movement obviously tended to place primary stress upon the social *use* of writing in the most immediate sort of way.

Of course it is easy to be superior when looking back and to blame early leftwing criticism for what happened. To some degree the errors of yesterday were the errors of youthful growth. I refuse to believe they were unavoidable; but they were typical of the excess which almost every young literary movement falls into, especially one which represents the viewpoint of a rising class. As a matter of fact, the early emphasis upon the use-value of writing was not entirely of a negative character; it made some contribution to the body of literary experiment. And the existence of "leftism" in no way nullifies the fundamental benefits which grew out of the writer's identification with the revolutionary movement—positive results which have been mentioned too frequently to need repetition here. Nor does it nullify the artistic value of many early proletarian novels, plays, stories and poems—the best of which unwittingly repudiated the dominant critical ideas of the period.

But the old, amorphous kind of criticism is still with us. Surely there is no longer any excuse for its persistence. To allow it to continue is to stunt the growth of proletarian literature. Those who are most injured by it are the writers who have unreservedly embraced revolutionary principles: the narrow view of "leftism" is cramping their progress today. Those who are least affected are the men of letters who stand aloof from Communism as artists while announcing their sympathies with it as men; they are likely to find in Farrell's point of view a rationalization for their continued aloofness. However, this is a chance that will have to be taken. The point is that Farrell's criticism is chiefly relevant to the writers who have been working in revolutionary material and experience: his book is immediately pertinent to their internal problems.

Camp Is All Right for Kids

IRVING FINEMAN

IT WAS a fine day. The train ran whistling along the West Shore, between the Palisades and the river, and it was a pleasure to look out on either side: at the wide river gleaming grayblue in the sun, and high wooded cliffs hanging in rich, colored folds. It was a fine October day, coolwarm. We had one end of the car, and you would never think we were going back to the CCC. More like kids on a picnic; shouting over the rumble and rattle of the train; pointing—"Look at that, look at the sailboat, now ain't that somethin'! How would you like to be out there sailin', Tony?" And Tony running up and down the aisle like a monkey, with his bottle of sour dago red, squeezing in with one pair and getting roughhoused and then hopping across the aisle to another. "Have a drink, buddy. Take a good swig. Good, eh?" his black eyes softly shining, the brown skin at their corners wrinkling.

You can't beat those wops. You would never think

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that when Tony got home that time he had found his wife gone, the flat in Mulberry Street vacant. "Sold every goddamn thing in the house, even my war medals." He claimed he got them for bravery, fighting the Austrians, "hoppin' around on the mountains just like a goddamn goat." He was about old enough, close to forty, his thick, dark hair beginning to gray over the ears. "But what the hell," laughed Tony, and threw back his head and let the red wine trickle into his red mouth. "Now you take a drink." And when the train slowed down and pulled up to the little station he was the first one out, shouting, "Come on, bums, shake a leg!"

The river was narrower here, bluer, between the points of high, rounded hills. The little station lay quiet between the river and a dark green hill, nothing but a shack and a wooden platform weathered gray in the sun. The camp truck wasn't there yet, so we waited at the station. For a while, Tony sat with the older men against the wall of the shack, talking politics, the New Deal, what would help business, Mussolini, the war in Africa. . . . When Tony got excited we could hear him sputter: "But what the hell . . . the hell with that . . . but goddamn it, I've been to a war, and I don't want any more of that—and I don't want any more camping, either. Camp is all right for kids. I'm a first class mechanic, I am. What the hell. . . . "

After a while, he came over and joined us younger fellows, where we lay stretched out on the sun-warmed platform, our heads in the shade, with our packages for pillows. We were telling stories: "It seems this fellow spent the night at a lonely farmhouse, and the farmer had a pretty daughter. . .", you know, and then another. At the end of each story, shouts of uproarious laughter and the smacking of thighs and then, "That's like the one about . . . " , and another one started.

We had had a couple of rounds, each one chiming in, except Swede. He lay there listening, his shaggy blond head propped up on his sunburnt arms, his sleeves rolled up to where the muscles bulged, milk-white. He had his jacket off and his collar open at the neck, as if it were a hot summer day; you got the feeling Swede didn't need clothes to be comfortable, like a healthy animal. He didn't say a thing; just lay there listening, his chinablue eyes staring out towards the smoothblue river.

When Tony came over, he stood over Swede, listening too, while someone told a story about how Pat went to confession and got some pointers from the priest, and then Tony laughed and said: "That reminds me . . . " and started a long story about a young fellow who wanted very much to get married. It was funny, the way Tony told it, with his shrugging shoulders and the quick suggestive motions of his brown hands, and we all laughed like hell when he finished. We were still laughing when Swede got up, not laughing, and picked up his jacket and went over to the baggage cart that was standing by the station shack. He sat down on the cart, his legs drawn up, his solid arms on his knees, holding his towhead between his big fists and looking out at the river. He was no more than twenty and strong as an ox.

Tony stopped laughing and said: "The poor sap wants to get married, too. He wants his woman. But what's he goin' to get married on? And if he does get married, what's he goin' to keep his woman on, or his kids? On relief? Kin you blame a woman for sellin' out on a man? What's a woman want with a goddamn boyscout away in camp? Camp is all right for kids. A man don't want a camp. But they're learnin' us. Maybe they're learnin' us to get along without women. I learned in the war, and now I'm learnin' in a camp. Maybe they're learnin' us to be like kids. What the hell. . . . "

If Swede heard him, he gave no sign. Tony glanced at the drawnup figure, turned and went over to him. Alongside Swede, Tony looked small, slender, very brown. He leaned against the cart and said something teasing, to which the other responded only with the twitch of a blond eyelash, as if flicking off an insect. But the little man smiled and with the brown knuckles of his clenched fist, lightly jabbed the other's arm, again and again, until the husky one with an easy swing brushed the teaser off. But back Tony came, this time more intent, with provoking jabs under the solid ribs, again and again, until Swede, as if suddenly stung, jumped down from the cart, seized Tony, and wrestled with him.

The little brown man was strong too, and agile, and they wrestled all over the dusty platform, rolling out of the shade and into the sun, Tony prolonging the fight by letting himself go until he was almost pinned down and then squirming up in the nick of time. Both were flushed and breathing hard; the back of Swede's neck was bright red, and his hair stood up in disordered clumps; Tony's teeth flashed between his drawn lips, and curly veins stood out on his brown temples and hands; but they were both enjoying the scrimmage like a pair of puppies—only there was more of guile in the little man's antics, as he played with the magnificent strength of the big lad. Finally Swede got a scissors hold on Tony's legs and pinned him down, kneeling over him, holding Tony's legs clamped between his powerful thighs, and pressing down with his huge hands on the little man's shoulders. Then, smiling and breathless, and looking up into Swede's face with his soft dark eyes, Tony reached up one brown fist and slowly pressed up into the other's groin.

It was not a foul offensive—that was clear; it was so deliberate. And Swede, surprisingly, took no offense. Instead, a look of dull dawning, of awakened understanding and stolid sympathy, of some strong

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emotion, but not shock, not anger, came up slowly into the lad's broad, downbent face. He paused, still holding the other down, and for a full instant leaned over him. Then firmly took the little man's arm and removed his hand; released his hold and rose.

No word passed between them. Tony got up and dusted off his pants. As he bent over, Swede reached out and took from Tony's breast pocket the pack of cigarettes he kept there. Swede took a cigarette and returned the pack to Tony, who drew a match and went and struck it on the edge of the baggage cart and gave Swede a light and lit one for himself. Then they stood leaning against the cart, smoking and looking out at the sunny river until the truck came from the camp.

Poem

remember now there were others before this
now when the unwanted hours rise up
and the sun rises red in unknown quarters
and the constellations change places
and cloudless thunder erases the furrows
and moonlight stains and the stars grow hot
though the air is foetid conscripted fathers
with the black bloat of your dead faces
though men wander idling out of factories
where turbine and hand are both freezing
and the air clears at last above the chimneys
though mattresses curtain the windows
and every hour hears the snarl of explosion
yet one shall rise up alone saying
"I am one out of many I have heard
voices high in the air crying out commands
seen men's bodies burst into torches
seen faun and maiden die in the night air raids
heard the watchwords exchanged in alleys
felt hate speed the blood stream and fear curl the nerves
I know too the last heavy maggot
and know the trapped vertigo of impotence
I have travelled prone and unwilling
in the dense processions through the shaken streets
shall we hang thus by taut navel strings
to this corrupt placenta till we're flyblown
till our skulls are cracked by crow and kite
and our members become the business of ants
our teeth the collection of magpies?"
they shall rise up heroes there will be many
none will prevail against them at last
they go saying each "I am one of many"
their hands empty save for history
they die at bridges bridgegates and drawbridges
remember there were others before
the sepulchres are full at ford and bridgehead
there will be children with flowers there
and flower gardens and flower cities there
and lambs and golden eyed lions there
and people remembering in the future

KENNETH REXROTH

A Season in Heaven*

PHILIP RAHV

IT IS only natural that T. S. Eliot, who has been sufficiently publicised as the fugleman of literary reaction, should have written a verse drama asserting his belief in death and man's utter wretchedness. Eliot has long held the view that this is what any "really serious belief in life" must come to. Where the surprise came in—most unpleasantly for the left critics—was in the fact that Eliot spoke his message of darkness in the unmistakable accents of a major poem. The critics had decided that Eliot's godliness had done for him, and here he was flying in the face of their stigmas.

To say that great art has a way of making even the death-rattle sound like the rattle of tambourines is all too easy, and withal quite useless. Caught short by the contradiction between their habitual simplicities and Eliot's performance, several of the left critics declared the play to be fascist, and hence, by implication, beyond the pale of analysis and interpretation. By itself such procedure is ludicrous enough, but here it is doubly so. The conflict the play portrays is between Church and State, the spiritual and temporal orders, the spirit and the flesh; and this conflict is so pointed as to pillory all profane aspiration and power. If classic Christianity be fascism, then Christ becomes the prototype of Hitler and every priest a storm-trooper. By the same token, in stressing another aspect of Christian doctrine, one can make out a case for Christ as the prototype of Marx. And, indeed, a horde of humanitarian gents are quite adept at this game.

It is true, of course, that of late Eliot has been steering close to fascism in his general attitude to the problems of our time. But that by no means signifies that his poetry, existing and potential, is automatically suffused with the fascist spirit. Every work of art, no matter how sure we are of its origin, must be examined anew. There is always the possibility of creative contradictions, on which the dialectic feeds. The danger lies in the excess of confidence with which we tend to identify the *apparent* idea of a work with the work as written, its intention with its actual meaning, and finally its individual quality with the quality of its creator's complete works.

In criticism, as in science, exactness of observation and statement is indispensable. Without it, even if our general principles are right, we somehow man-

* *Murder in the Cathedral,* by T. S. Eliot. Harcourt, Brace. $1.25. *Bury the Dead,* by Irwin Shaw. Random House. $1.00.

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age to be specifically wrong. Thus it is one thing to say that the religious denial of the world is purely theoretical, and that in the main religion accomodates itself to fascism as it has accomodated itself to capitalism. But to claim that Eliot's play is fascist is something else again. All we can say is that though its internal drive is really against all politics, in a sense its social use is nevertheless political. In essence the spiritual slavery promulgated by the Church is but the ideological reflex of real social slavery, in the flesh. But historic facts of this order cannot excuse the frivolity of some Marxist critics, who make a practice of skipping intrinsic stages and distinctions in order the more easily to blur the difference between the specific content of a work of art and its possible objective effects, which more often than not are rather vague and remote. Moreover, criticism that discards such basic distinctions must end in equating literature with life. And the failure to distinguish between literature and life is almost as bad as the failure to see their close and necessary relationship.

To my mind, in *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot has written his best poetry since *The Waste Land*. Its magnificent lucidity, so much in contrast to the symbolic mazes of his previous devotional verse, mirrors itself in a trembling and dolorous music. The diction is lyrical, yet dry and firm, its slight biblical cast and rare ecclesiastical phrase tempered by the neutral words of current speech. The obligations of a definite historical theme as well as the clear pattern imposed by the dramatic medium seem to have prevented the poet from clawing his way through caverns of history and mythology, as is his wont. If *The Waste Land* was written in water, this new poetry is cut into stone.

The structure, too, is simple and ingenuous. Thomas Becket returns to Canterbury after a long exile abroad. The first conflict represented is self-conflict, with Becket's soul as the arena, when he casts out the devils within himself,—the four tempters arguing earthly pleasure, ambition, treason and pride. After the *entr'acte* of the Christmas morning sermon, in which Becket heeds the summons of martyrdom and resigns himself to die, the main conflict comes to a head. The four knights appear—messengers of the king, figures out of earth, cruel and lustful—who kill Becket as they blaspheme. At once a metaphorical curtain is dropped on the historic scene as the knights step out of their parts and address the audience in the corrupt and ingratiating speech of modern politics. This is the continuation of blasphemy, ironically transposed into the typical cliches of British respectability and parliamentary eyewash. After having heard the lofty incantation:

Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:
I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight,

etc., or the lyric beat of a line like:

The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in darkness,

we hear the honorific vocabulary of meetings in sentences like: "In the answer to these questions lies the key to the problem," or, "I have nothing to add along their particular lines of argument." Here the poetry of exaltation takes the cure in the prose of private convenience and genial demagogy. The result is comic relief, a vertiginous reversal of tone and tempo. In an instant the reader or spectator, laughing cynically, turns hard-headed and a bit rowdy. The final chorus, intoning a beatific vision, sounds uninspired, as dull as a hymn or a patriotic ode. The spell has been broken. The poet wanted to show us the sameness of history, that nothing changes, but history threw him aside to repeat itself as farce. No doubt this interlude has its logic within the play's orthodox scheme, yet the effect is as if someone had pulled up a blind and instead of Dante's gloomy visage we had caught a glimpse of Sweeney's grinning mug. Or perhaps it is that small house agent's clerk we see, "the young man carbuncular" of the celebrated typist's episode, on his way for another bout of love? Can it be that Eliot's religion is really a form of wilful esthetics? If so he is man enough to be damned, and we shall not be prevented "from praying for his repose."

It has been said that every work of art is an act of collaboration between reader and creator. Let us measure, then, the truth of that statement against Eliot's play. Did our sensibility really respond to the desiccated pattern of theological salvation? It cannot be that we were pleased by the stale art of the old-time vamps! No, it is not Becket and the women of Canterbury, the knights and the tempters, but we ourselves who are here represented. The pattern has been rent asunder by a tragedy altogether temporal—and to the poet perhaps both absurd and terrifying—giving the play overtones and meanings in another sphere, one close to our interests and desires.

I believe that the chorus in this play, chanting the doom of man, develops a language and a meaning for that doom much in excess of its presupposition in the dogma of man's sinful nature and the need for expiation. Are we listening to the mournful cry of a doom "out of time," born in the jungle of prehistory, whence the religious ethos springs? or is this a doom posthumous to theology, very much in our own time?

Sweet and cloying through the dark air
Falls the stifling scent of despair . . .

or:

Here is no continuing city, here is no abiding stay.
Ill the wind, ill the time, uncertain the profit, certain the danger.
O late late late, late is the time, late too late, and rotten the year;

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Evil the wind, and bitter the sea, and grey the sky, grey grey grey.

The intensity mounts, the poet's thought is sensualized and transmuted into emotion. Eliot's civilization smells the detah-bringers, its values disintegrate:

I have tasted
The savour of putrid flesh in the spoon. I have felt
The heaving of earth at nightfall, restless, absurd. I have heard
Laughter in the noises of beasts that make strange noises: jackal, jackass, jackdaw; the scurrying noise of mouse and jerboa; the laugh of the loon, the lunatic bird. I have seen
Grey necks twisting, rat tails twining, in the thick light of dawn. I have eaten
Smooth creatures still living, with the strong salt taste of living things under sea,

and further:

I have smelt
Corruption in the dish, incense in the latrine, the sewer in the incense, the smell of sweet soap in the woodpath, a hellish sweet scent in the woodpath, while the ground heaved. I have seen
Rings of light coiling downwards, leading
To the horror of the ape. Have I not known, not known
What was coming to be?

From the arteries of "God," cut open, streams the blood of secular humanity. This is an apocryphal vision of a death as much feared as desired. With this the play hooks itself on to the positive elements of our reality, that death's *necessity,* and the poet, though pining for relief in the lap of the infinite, begets his bastard child—a prophetic sense of our age.

Moreover, what has become of the Christian man, man in the singular, that *identical* creature of dogma? Why does the chorus harp upon the image of the "common man," the "small folk"? Throughout the action Eliot-Becket, the clerical philosopher, answers the complaints of those "who acknowledge themselves the type of the common man" in contrast to those who walk "secure and assured" in their fate. Who hatched this heresy of a plural man, veritably a class conception in disguise? Has Eliot heard of the role of the masses in history, of their refusal to become the fodder of eternity? Is the image of the small folk the poet's bad conscience?

Archbishop, secure and assured of your fate, unaffrayed among the shades, do you realize what you ask, do you realize what it means
To the small folk drawn into the pattern of fate, the small folk who live among small things...

The protest of the commoners, however, always meets the stopgap reply: The sin of the world is upon your heads. Yet it is in the self-portrayal of these plebeians that concrete life emerges. Sometimes the corn fails them, one year is a year of dryness, another of rain, there have been oppression and taxes, girls have unaccountably disappeared, still they have gone on living, "living and partly living." (This word *partly,* denatured, unpoetic, recurs throughout and throughout turns into its opposite. Loaded with the burden of the real, it violates its many "poetic" contexts, thus animating them with a superior poetry, the genuine poetry of surprise and humility.)

The dislocation of the poet's intention continues. We do not feel the "joyful consummation" heralded as the play ends. The formal cause of the horror expressed by the chorus—the crime of murder absolutized in "an instant eternity of evil and wrong"—remains an abstraction. The horror is not realized as such, its language is nowise equivalent to the peculiar logic of its indicated motivation. History, ever determinate, will not be cheated of its offspring; though the poem recoils from history, only history can give it life. And in his essay on Baudelaire, Eliot has himself perceived why this is so. Though Baudelaire, he says, was the first counter-romantic, he was still inevitably the child of romanticism. If the poet is sincere, "he must express with individual differences the general state of mind—not as a *duty,* but simply because he cannot help participating in it."

I have suggested a creative contradiction in Eliot that makes him our contemporary in more than a chronological sense. Yet there are many whose distorted critical ideas allow them to see only explicit ideology in a work of art, and unable to share the poet's beliefs, they find themselves unable to enjoy his poetry. This is the real reason for the crude treatment the play received from some of the left critics. What these critics don't see is that their approach isolates them from literature as an historical entity, particularly from the literature of the past. We can understand the immediate pleasure a critic gets from an ideological correspondence between himself and the work he criticises, but let him beware lest this immediate pleasure become a vice blinding him to other and related values.

As against Eliot's bleached heaven of dissolution in the supernatural, young Mr. Shaw fashions a heaven on earth out of the potentialities of man and the movement of history. Becket would not be denied of his death, and he counters the counsel of the priests to save himself, with his longing:

I have had a tremour of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper,
And I would no longer be denied. . . .

But in *Bury the Dead* the dead soldier Driscoll, on hearing his wife reproach him for losing his religion and for the "edge of arrogance" in his speech, answers in simple words: "I have heaven in my two hands to give to men. There's reason for arrogance." And the dead soldier Shelling refuses burial, for he has not had his fill of "lookin' and smellin'

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and talkin'." It is this primal materialism that gives *Bury the Dead* its pathos and human lore. In Shaw, Eliot would probably recognize an articulate member of that school of happiness and progress which to him are synonymous with deterioration. Yet how drowsy and feeble Eliot looks in the strong light of the dead's impetuous will to life. It is not, of course, as two writers that I am comparing Eliot to Shaw, but as the mouthpieces of two antithetical traditions: and it is the voice of Europe as we have come to know it since the Renaissance that speaks in Shaw's play. Elizabethan tragedy echoes with the cry, "What a piece of work is man!"; and it is out of that same humanist impulsion, which makes possible a tragic attitude, that the revolutionary writer creates. But the Christian and tragic attitudes are mutually exclusive. Eliot has cut himself off from the tradition of humanism. His heaven is antipodal to ours, and though his art is a crooked mirror, we can nevertheless trace the pattern of our salvation, albeit distorted, in the perdition it records. For in a world of warring classes that perdition is the complement to our salvation.

Bury the Dead has been acclaimed as the best anti-war play written in America. It has faults of structure and failures of feeling, but is is undoubtedly that. It seems to me that this is so because the play goes beyond its immediate subject, giving us a sense of experience on manifold planes of living, in the human meanings and universal impulses that any political situation involves. Under the influence of vulgar criticism, most revolutionary plays move solely in the cramped boundaries of the political and economic issues serving as their direct impetus. That constricts their possibilities as drama. In someone else's hands Shaw's device of the dead soldiers coming to life would have become merely another occasion for speeches. For just as some philistine once defined French literature as a long talk to the ladies, so our newest philistines, if they take what they write seriously, would define revolutionary literature as a long speech to the masses.

I have praised Eliot's poetry; and I believe that its example cannot be ignored by the young revolutionary poets. Precisely as an example of achievement we should see it, rather than as an influence on the actual texture of revolutionary verse. It is a poetry various and complex. It has an historic sense, both of language and of events; it summarizes centuries of experiment and discovery; above all, it is precise, contemporary, sustained by a sensibility able to transform thought and feeling into each other and combine them in simultaneous expression. Our poets cannot return to the vapid sublimities of Victorian verse, or to the homespun doggerel of the sectarian past. Neither is it necessary to encase Marx's titanic brain in a steel helmet. The variety and complexity —yes, exactly that—of our philosophy and of our experience, to be recreated, must command a poetry both various and complex. I am speaking of the main body of poetry, not of the ephemeral and immediate forms suitable for specific occasions. Nor does that mean that obscurity is called for, for obscurity is primarily a quality of certain kinds of content, and becomes a quality of technic only in a secondary, conditioning sense.

Pockets Full of Southwind

JESSE STUART

POLLY said to me: "Thorpin, come along. We'll see the Judge. He is to meet his court today. He's meeting them where Hog Branch Road and Sand Suck Road make the X at the sycamore tree. They meet to plan a county bridge. Melvin Sperry said they did. He ought to know. He's next to the Judge. You come with me."

Polly and me go down the path. It is a crooked path. Horseweeds are on both sides of the path. Lord, how them things sting in the sun. Pizenvines wind around the Sandy sycamores like baby greensnakes. The sand is hot on our bare feet. We go uphill and downhill. Around the slews of sand. I do not mind so much. But Polly minds. Polly is pregnant. No, she is not puffed with wind. She is going to have a baby. If the child comes alive, we'll have seven living. If the child comes dead, we'll have seven dead. It is a toss-up.

Polly used to be the prettiest woman in the hills. She's no hag. Time working in the fields had bent her back. Hoe handles has toughened her hands. Time and worry has grayed her hair. Her hair used to be black as a crow's wing. Her teeth was pretty, too. They are like so many dead stumps, now, in the clearing.

"But the Judge," I say to Polly, "he is full of wind. He is full of wind as a hog bladder is full of wind when it has been puffed to and left in the smokehouse to blow up on Christmas Day. The Judge is full of the same kind of wind. Only his wind stinks a little more. It is the kind of wind that won't carry a trifle of truth. It won't blow a leaf of truth across a hollow."

In my pockets there isn't anything but wind. I pull the lining out. I show you. My pocket lining is like a small, dark cloud. I show it to you. See. It is a dirty, shriveled half-moon. Under it is less than a breath of wind. You cannot see the wind. But it is there.

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Polly is not full of wind like the Judge. You ought to see. We have come upon them now. Sweat like white soupbeans pops out over Polly's face. Sweat drips from the end of my nose. That's where I always sweat. On the end of the nose. The Judge has a cool, mossy-looking face. He doesn't sweat. He is on the bank under a shade tree. The Judge has his hat in his hand. His old, bald, mushmellon head is shining in the May sunlight like a peeled onion. His ears stand up like two wild lettuce leaves under a shade tree. His little blue-veined hands dilly-dally with the wind. They are talking about a bridge to the wind. His eyes are blue snake-eyes looking at the wind.

I could say to Polly: "There's the members of the Judge's Court in the woods. We ought to feed them some roasted snake eggs and see how they'd like a new brand of food. There is the Judge. If he did not wear clothes, his belly would be shapeless as a puffy mushroom on a rotten beech stump. I could tell the Judge this. What would the Judge say? This is what I think anyway."

Polly could tell me: "The members of his Fiscal Court are full of wind. We vote for bags of wind. One is full of North Wind. One is full of East Wind. One is full of West Wind. One is full of South Wind. One is full of wind from the mushrooms. The Judge is full of all these winds. But I am not. I am filled with a new life, a new spirit."

Polly and me look through the hazel thicket. It is just beginning to leaf. Thin leaves flutter in the Spring wind. They are very pretty, above the water. The Judge does not see them. He looks into the wind. A crow flies over the Judge. I wish it would deposit its bank roll on his bald head and cover up the rays of sun bouncing from that onion-peeled rock.

Polly whispers to me: "Thorpin, an old sow and four pigs."

"Shhhhhh—shhhhhh—shhhhhh." I hold my finger over my mouth and point to her. "Shhhhhh—shhhhhh. Be quiet. We have to have bread. We must eat. You know that. We got to buy a plow. We got to get seeds to put in the ground. You can't use a little paper pad and a pencil out here like you used to use. You used to wear a white shirt and a necktie when I checked cars at the Wimpleton Railroad yards. Now get quiet, please. You must not whisper loud as the wind in the hazel bushes. The Judge will hear."

The Judge talks with his hands. The court members smoke. They smoke cigars big as grapevines cut up in sticks of stovewood. Each cigar is big as a grapevine stick. I wish you could see the smoke going up into the pretty sunlit air of May. They laugh. They talk to the Judge. The crow flies over again. Birds sing on the boughs. There is a nest on a bent-over-the-creek waterbirch. It has four blue eggs in it. The mother bird sings. The male bird sings. Spring again. Life. Here is Polly. Six birds in the nest at home. She talks. I talk. We are together. It is Spring. Birds dig in the earth. They catch in the air. They have to eat. We dig in the earth. We must see the Judge first. He is our catch. We have to eat.

I say to Polly: "I don't give a damn, I'm going over and speak to the Judge and his court. I don't care if I didn't vote for him. I'll tell him, if he asks. He knows, anyway. My pockets are full of south wind. I must have something in my pockets besides the wind. Spring is here. You are here. Birds have nests with eggs in them. They bring life into the world. You are here. You are not full of wind. You bring life into the world. Summer will be here after while. It will be too late to plant. We need seeds. We need grub. We need mule power. We need a few days of work. Autumn will trail summer, you know—and snow will follow autumn. Life goes in a cycle, like the seasons. We are in our summer now. I must speak to the Judge. A pocket full of wind won't help in the winter."

Leaves are slippery under my feet. I have a funny feeling. But it goes in this game of voting. You never know which way you are voting bread—to you or away from you. It is uncertain as the wind blows. One side will get the bread. One must bow. One must ask of the other side. What will one do if one doesn't. I hate to ask. Hell, yes, I do. I hate to stoop. I hate to be the conquered. But I am the conquered. You are the conquered. We are all defeated. We are all conquered after all—after any way we vote.

"And you did not," says the Judge.

"No," I say, "I did not."

"Then," says the Judge, "go to your own friends. Go to your rolled-in-the-mud friends. We beat to the roll. We got you first. If you'd a got us, what would we have done. Without, of course. Go to your defeated friends. They can give you a sack of beans, maybe—a pick, a shovel, a sack of flour. They can give you a loan on your farm. They can put two hams in your smoke house, where you didn't have but one under our administration. Isn't that what your man said, when we rolled him under? Who's putting hams in the smokehouse now?"

I do not speak. But I could say: "They do not put anything in my pockets. What I had in my pockets is all gone. I used to take green paper every Saturday to the hole-in-the-wall. It was something to have. A wind crept in overnight and blew it away, or the mice cut it up. I don't know. That was security. It was security against old age, time, death, grub, taxes."

"And, now," said South Wind, with his belly working up and down when he gruntingly laughed, his head up in the wind like the little end of a pop bottle, "we eat our own wind. We grind it in a sausage mill. That gives it flavor, you know. Did you ever taste the wind? Tastes fine, don't it? Well,

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if you never did, go and taste it now and see how it tastes."

"Thank you, South Wind," I say.

"You are welcome," says North Wind, "just keep your change."

I did. I kept my change. I put it in my pocket with the other wind.

"You'll learn to help the Judge," says North Wind, "the next time the Judge needs your help."

"Yes, he'll learn at least to not fight the Judge. Go out and say the other fellow will put two hams in the smokehouse where there is one. You ain't got any hams in the smokehouse where there was one."

I am one of the Lost Tribe that didn't help the Judge. I walk back across the slippery dead leaves that brown-star green sprigs of grass under the shade trees thin-leafed by the creek. I walk back to Polly. She doesn't want them to see her. She looks through the thin-leafed hazel sprouts. Polly is not full of wind. Spring. Summer. Autumn with leaves turned brown and birds going south. Empty smoke house. Empty fruitjars. Empty cellar. Empty barn. Lean milk cow. Life not there. Food not there. Six mouths to feed, seven not to feed. Seven feeding the weeds. Seven mouths to feed. Six not feed. Six feeding the weeds. The male bird chirrups on the water birch. The hen bird sings. Life. Life. The wind. The Judge. Votes! A lean, hungry wind sifting the thin snow against the poplar planks in the empty cowshed. The hog bladder busted.

"By-by, to you," the winds say.

"I'll see you in the funnies," I say.

"Yes, or on the road to hell," says Polly, coming from behind the thin-leafed hazel sprouts.

"Keep still," I say to Polly, "this is the dealings of men."

"It does concern a woman," says Polly. "The newborn. The empty pockets. The wind. It is something to concern a woman. We give to the earth. We give to the earth as land gives to the flowers and brush. We give life, and more life, and more life."

I say to Polly as we climb the hill back. "Listen to me please! Listen, all of you! Listen, you with the mellow, hound-dog eyes. You, the hog-tied to the Judge with the pencil X mark. Listen! You with the sloven lips. You with the calloused hands. You who search and never find. Every man a bag of wind. Every woman a bag of wind. The dog his day."

Polly has white beads of sweat on her face. The mountain path is hard for her to climb. The sheep bells tinkle among the trees. The bees buzz on the milkweeds. Birds sing among the leaves. Earth is young. Spring is here. We go up the mountain path.

The house is empty now. It is hollow—a lean-to shell against the wind. Rats talk to the Judge. Rats have the house. They hear the wind. It does not matter. Snow flies in flurries through the winter-blue air. The flakes pitty-patty like mice feet through the broken windows to the floor. Seven feed the grass.

The Humanism of André Malraux

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

THE reception given *Man's Fate* by left-wing critics when it first appeared in this country, in 1934, was almost a literary scandal. Smugly assuming that the values of *Man's Fate* are nothing more than its political observations, the reviewers ransacked it for errors as though it were a pamphlet on China. "Where are the workers?"; "It doesn't show the way out!"—were heard from all sides. Fortified by belligerent "leftist" slogans, these critics were able to compensate for their insensitiveness to the variety and novelty of meanings that make up a novel. Their theories sanctioned an escape from literature. Malraux's novel was revolutionary in the entire range of its perceptions, while these critics had hypnotized themselves into the belief that a revolutionary novel must be a trumpet-call to concrete action. The constant reiteration that art is a reflection of experience, by some psychotic inversion, caused them to ignore the specific experience that a novel draws upon.

One of Malraux's generalizations about writing would seem to be a clue to his own work. In his preface to his new novel, *Days of Wrath*,* he says, "if the work's value, justification, and chances of lasting reside in its *quality,* then its content—regardless of the author's intention—alters the existing emotional scale: without an inexorable necessity for such alteration the work would doubtless not have come into being." Such a change in the emotional scale seems to have been made by Malraux: in the direction of a new *humanism,* emphasizing the dignity, the heroism, the fellowship of man, and the activity to shape a world in which these qualities would not have to be fought for. Evidently perceiving that purely communist values in psychology and ethics do not yet exist, and that the prattle about a pure worker's world in fiction is a formula for escaping the complexity of human relations, Malraux took as his central idea the regeneration of man in revolutionary situations. In *Man's Fate* some typical representatives of various social groups—a French entrepreneur, an old Chinese humanist philosopher, a terrorist, a communist leader, a broken-down worker—are taken through a critical period of the Chinese revolution. A polarizing of their personalities ensues: those who are steered into the revolution take on greater human stature; the characters who are engaged in blocking it are plunged into a maelstrom of self-deceptions and perversions. In this sense *Man's Fate* is a saga of rebirth and decay.

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Days of Wrath, a story of the imprisonment of a communist functionary in a Nazi concentration camp, and his release through the substitution of another communist for him, is less a recreation of Nazi Germany than an idyll of fortitude and loyalty. These traditional virtues of man have been sung in every Christian choir, but in the novels of Malraux they emerge from the psychological tensions that a world in change produces. For the most part, Malraux's humanism is a process of human development, rather than a roster of ideals, giving his work great driving waves of power as some character is impelled to a cataclysmic act by the force of external events and by the urge to psychological completion of his character. But often the fusion of idea and event—as in the central conception of destiny in *Man's Fate*—is imperfect, with the result that events sometimes appear to be lagging behind the unfolding of character. When this happens we are left with the impression that Malraux is directing the events of tomorrow with the philosophy of yesterday.

Man's Fate is built on a philosophy of fatalism. Che'en, the terrorist, is doomed from his first assassination at the opening of the book. Fearing death, yet morbidly fascinated by it, he is finally liberated when, bomb in hand, he throws himself under a car supposedly carrying Chiang Kai-shek. In an atmosphere laden with political and tactical necessities, Che'en's exemption from political influences restraining him from his final adventure, take him out of the motivations of the book. And Kyo's suicide in prison, though connected more directly with the failure of the revolution, is a little too dependent on Clapique's failure to warn him of the plan to arrest him. In his last acts, Kyo, depressed by expectancy of the impending annihilation of the communists, moves on, like a tired actor, to his fate. Detachments of workers fight their last battles, certain of defeat, against hopelessly overwhelming odds, for no intelligent political reason. It would almost seem that a mood of defeat swept the closing events onward. Even the failure of the revolution, attributed by Malraux to the tactic of not breaking with the Kuomintang, is not sufficiently explained to make Malraux's version credible. Here, too, it is the sense of tragic defeat which is the *deus ex machina.* Curiously, old Gisor, the father of Kyo, is the articulate spokesman for the idea of fate. And he is presented as the theoretical side of Kyo, as it were, for after Kyo's death, old Gisor remarks that Marxism no longer exists as a vital force for him, that his connection with it existed solely through the activity of his son whom he loved.

Of course, granting Malraux's premises, or ignoring them, since these conceptions do not define the novel, but are merely a pull toward a tangent, it is obvious that *Man's Fate* is a magnificent book. Malraux's humanism permits the scaling of emotional heights by the characters. When Hemmelrich, a frustrated, cowed worker, comes upon the torn bodies of his wife and child, the hope of revenge and the release from fear for his family transfix him with a savage hatred for Chiang Kai-shek. After Kyo's death, his wife pushes everything out of her life to devote herself, with the austerity of a nun, to the revolution. And Malraux achieves a kind of neurotic intensity in almost every situation, because every act, every conversation is at some junction of a person's career. Take the opening scene, where Che'en is hovering over the bed of an official ready to plunge his dagger into him. Here Che'en's decomposition begins; the political tone of the book is set; and we are launched headlong into a sea of battle and conspiracy. And the tragic intensity with which the novel concludes, reaching its symbolic peak in the losing of the cyanide in jail, is set in motion like a great tide toward about the middle of the book. During the first half we see the accumulation of the forces of revolt, and the revolutionists crowd the foreground. As the failure of the revolution becomes clear, however, French and Chinese decadents are brought forward. There is Clapique, that shattered petty trader, pretending to be on the verge of suicide in order to get a more exotic pleasure with a prostitute; Ferral, the French merchant who dreams of empires and schemes with thugs; and old Gisor, pouring his life into his son, while preserving his spirit for the quiescence of opium. The emotional cadences are pitched to the mood of the moment and to the stage of development of the characters.

Days of Wrath has the same qualities of psychological intensity, with each moment made crucial by the gravity of associations poured into it. Malraux's description of Kassner's airplane ride from Germany into Czechoslovakia weaves together a sense of fellowship with the pilot who is sacrificing his life on the flight, Kassner's dizzy feeling of freedom merged with the loss of bearings in the storm, and his constant recollection that another man is dying in his place. There is even greater lyric concentration than in *Man's Fate* on the character's state of mind, as in Kassner's fight against the waves of insanity that pulse through his brain. In his introduction to *Days of Wrath,* Waldo Frank aptly describes this quality: "Because the events of his life have been chiefly psychological, his quest for the seeds of the true person has remained analytical; his works, although fully formed as esthetic bodies, are intimate lyrical projections." In compactness and circumscribed subtlety *Days of Wrath* reminds one of Andreyev's *Seven That Were Hanged.* But, for all its power, it comes dangerously close to being a *tour-de-force.*

Few of the philosophic ideals that persist outside of *Man's Fate* hover over *Days of Wrath.* Malraux's humanism is here largely embodied in the

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simple growth of Kassner to self-realization and dignity against a backdrop of Nazi brutality. But in cutting away a philosophic overgrowth Malraux seems to have found it necessary to destroy a large area of his experience, just as a man cannot really deny his past without perverting his present character. *Days of Wrath* lacks the variety and complexity of *Man's Fate,* getting whatever power it has through exploitation of all the lyric overtones of Kassner's battle for sanity and freedom. It is a journey of the spirit through a Nazi concentration camp, and, as such is hardly a picture of Germany today. Some critics who expect a novel to furnish the answer to all political questions will probably find *Days of Wrath* inadequate as a comprehensive study of class relations in Nazi Germany. Malraux's novel leaves too many things to their imagination. But, considered solely from the angle of its effectiveness as fiction, too little evidence for the actions of the characters is produced. If ideas and emotions are end-products of an almost infinite series of influences, are we not justified in looking for some of the bricks that built the responses of Kassner or Anna or the few Nazis?

What kind of a man was Kassner before he was imprisoned? What were his relations with his wife, with other Germans? How were the values created which steel Kassner through his inquisition and which urge another communist to give his life for the good of the cause? To have exposed these processes would have involved Malraux in the psychological background of the immediate situation, in the actual or associative past of the characters, in the lines of force steering behavior in Nazi Germany—in short, Malraux would have had to extend the references of social experience in order to convey the momentum behind every psychological crash. Where the premises and the values of the writer are commonly assumed, as in Mrs. Bloom's soliloquy, this may not be essential; but Malraux is attempting to order a relatively new world for fiction. Certainly, Malraux is aware of this problem, for in his introduction to *Days of Wrath* he says: "The individual stands in opposition to society, but he is nourished by it. And it is far less important to know what differentiates him than what nourishes him. . . . Every psychological life is an exchange." Yet the central conception of *Days of Wrath* is in contradiction to this idea of man as psychologically continuous with other men. Of *Days of Wrath* Malraux himself, says: "The world of a work like this, the world of tragedy, is the ancient world still—man, the crowd, the elements, woman, destiny. It reduces itself to two characters, the hero and his sense of life; individual antagonisms, which make possible the complexity of the full length novel, do not figure here." This is the dualism that has so far split Malraux's work: two ideas of tragedy: an inexorable law of human destiny, and a situation that arises in the course of events. It is hard to see how a resolution of this conflict is possible except in abandoning the idea of human destiny as something we inherit, for is not destiny the result of everything men do?

So far, Malraux has pitted humanism against fatalism—man's effort toward self-realization against the coils of a tragic destiny. In *Man's Fate* the robust hopes of men were broken on the wheel of destiny; in *Days of Wrath* a new world is in sight. But in the actual substance of the novels, events themselves are often in rebellion against remote-control by a philosophy of fatalism. Hence any criticism of this premise is an added appreciation of Malraux's work. The humanist values, however, are more deeply ingrained: they cannot be simply peeled off the body of his writing, since the experience of the novels is shaped to yield most of these values. Kassner and Kyo, for example, actually expand to a greater dignity. And, in large measure, most men who fight for a new world justify their activity to themselves in terms of some kind of humanism. It is only as social conditions are changed that human ideals are in turn revised. We are in a state of psychological transition, and Malraux's novels are a projection into fiction of this transition. But, further, in articulating our humanist mythology, Malraux's writing becomes part of our evolution. Every summation not only draws a curtain over some past, but also sets the stage for the next act.

On the other hand, the poverty of much revolutionary fiction in America comes from an attempt to construct a fabulous Christian world where political virtue triumphs over political evil, where neon signs point the moral, and conversion is swift and miraculous. That these allegories have little correspondence to the life of the American people, with its myriad psychological tensions and clashes, is evidenced by the further assumption that novels are to serve as direct instruments of conversion. If a novel is to have a social effect, it will come necessarily through its tracing of a shift in values from a position which is in some way identifiable with that of the reader's to one which is more humanly desirable and psychologically credible. Since much of the experience in such a novel is not directly motivated by economics, nor is it primarily instructive, whatever social effect it has will be but a part of its total meaning. Yet those revolutionary novelists—like Dos Passos, Farrell, Herbst, Cantwell—who have been more faithful to the ethos of the American people than to the demands of the utilitarians on the "left," have often been criticised for not showing the "way out." Confusing political meanings with political pointers, these critics became the spokesmen for the most extreme literalisms. And it was not long before their formulas were in opposition to the more significant revolutionary novels.

If Malraux's work achieves nothing more than

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a demonstration to revolutionary novelists and critics that the task of fiction is "to alter the existing emotional scale" through a profound study of the existing scale itself, it will have performed an honorable function.

Midsummer Night's Dream

She dreams. She sleeps. She breathes.
How lovely are her arms in the whiteness of the nights.
Her arms like rivers in a town,
to couch a head where the forget-me-not dies.
Her arms, time's girdle,
the gleam of consolations.

Her long hair heavier than the gold of sands
is the autumn of the unfamiliar world of love.
Her long hair where the red memory of October dies.
Her long hair full of railroads, signal-blocks,
with the loud shouts of soldiers in armored trains.
Her long hair full of singing birds and dramas.
Her long hair her long hair.

The softness of her breasts confided to the air's caress.
Breasts rent in shadow. Promises of a magic milk.
The softness of her breasts is made of an evening's peace
when beside a fountain the young loiter
to pluck ripened mulberries by the road.
The softness of her breasts is made of the youth of fields and
suburbs,
of all the youth of snowy mountain springs.
A vanilla scent on the palms of her hands.
And on her little mouth the sparkle of justice
the guillotine of baby teeth.

Her name brings to my lips the caress
of four letters, the mystery
of four letters. She has
four letters in her lover's name
four letters she
who bears a love name she
who bears a flower's name she
who bears a hope name she
who bears a woman's name a name of triumph,
the union of contraries, the tremendous marriage
of man and nature.

Lovely as the white coal entering the copper's heart
The Soviet Union awakes
and turns to the workers of the future
her womanly eyes of earth.

LOUIS ARAGON

Translated from the French by Samuel Putnam.

From a Strike Diary

JOHN MULLEN

Monday morning, 6:30 A. M.

THE first day of the strike. Only about fifty pickets showed up this morning. With four hundred on strike and only half a hundred turning out for the picket lines, things don't look so good. However, you can never tell what's liable to happen when you strike a steel mill, especially when it belongs to the Republic Steel Corporation.

The atmosphere around the mill reminds me of two men about to fight, coats flung to the ground, both wary and hesitant to strike the first blow.

Our few pickets are on edge and nervous at every sign of life over there across the street behind that big iron gate of the mill entrance. We know that the company bulls are behind that gate, riot clubs grasped nervously, and the flaps of their gun holsters open, ready for instant use. Occasionally one of the company guards peers at us through the bars of the gate, like an ape ogling the crowd from his cage. We stand around, speculating among ourselves whether or not there's more than just uniformed company guards over there. I see Sam Wagner, our local union president, talking to a group of pickets and walk over to get his opinion.

"Think there's more than just company bulls there?" I ask, inclining my head toward the gate.

He looks puzzled for a moment and stares intently at the mill entrance.

"Damned if I know," he replies, "we had some of the boys watching the mill all night and they report they saw closed cars driving in 'long about midnight." Then he adds hopefully, "Might be only company officials."

"Whole auto loads of bosses don't go driving into the mill at midnight, especially in closed cars," I answered. He pursed his lips and then, as though he doesn't want to believe this, he growls reluctantly.

"Guess you're right. Must be thugs."

One of the pickets motions to Wagner from across the street, and he goes over. I stand watching him. His broad shoulders slump wearily. Most of us have been without sleep for twenty four hours or more.

It's a queer sensation to be standing out front of the mill you've worked in for years; the same mill you walked into and rang the time-clock every morning, and then suddenly, you find yourself standing outside, ready to tear a man apart if he tries to

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go to work. Even the mill itself looks different. Like some huge live thing crouching motionless, ready to leap at you. Everything is quiet and forbidding. There are no more cars parked in front of the mill, and even the buses are not passing along their usual route. The neighborhood in the vicinity of the mill that usually teems with crowds and traffic every morning at this time is suddenly avoided, like a plague-ridden area. The very silence itself is charged with dynamite. We all feel it. We're on strike.

Occasionally a few of the men from the bigger mills up the line, the Alloy and Stark workers, pass us on their way to the day turn. They are all strong-sinewed fellows, but look as though the blood has been drained out of them. Some of them grin at us shyly. One of them passes close by me and mutters out of the side of his mouth: "Give them hell, kid!"

But that's just talk. If they would come out on strike with us, we'd have a better chance of winning. We can't lick the whole Republic Steel by striking one of the smallest mills. But we had to strike; there was nothing else to do. Months of promises from the labor boards, from the company itself, amounted to so much hot air. From the company we got this: "We have your proposals under consideration."

From the labor board, we got a bombastic decision in our favor, and we thought we were getting somewhere, but the company didn't even bother to reply to us or the labor board. So it was either strike, in the hope of winning a few cents increase, and recognition, or see the union wither away before our very eyes. And then the company would herd the men into the company union. Conditions could get no worse. We decided to strike.

So here we are, the first morning of the strike. Fifty of us picketing and the other three hundred and fifty—God knows where. One thing is in our favor from the beginning—the mill is empty. Excepting a few maintenance and boiler-room men, nobody on the Sunday night shift stayed inside to scab on us. They come out at quitting time this morning, walk past the picket lines, and go home. We ask them to stay and give us a hand, but most of them answer that they want to wash up and have breakfast. They will be back, they say. But it's 6:30 and only a few have returned.

Monday, 8 A. M.

A big, well-dressed guy comes out of the time office and crosses the street to where we are standing. You can see that he is a big shot. One of the boys recognizes him and says, "So help me, the division Super himself!" We think maybe he is coming over to bring some word from the company. Perhaps they want to call it off. But we know in our hearts that the company never quits without a fight. And neither will we.

White is this guy's name. I'm nearest to him when he crosses the street to us. He don't even say good morning. He looks surly.

"Who's in charge here?" He wrinkled his nose at me as if I smelled bad.

"Mr. Wagner, there," I point. "He's our president, our union president."

He walks through the pickets and over to Wagner and says in a rasping voice loud enough for all of us to hear, "Now you chaps can do all the striking you want," he begins. "It's within the law. But be damn careful you don't put your pickets over there on company property!" He jerks his thumb over his shoulder toward the sidewalk in front of the gate.

"We won't cross the street, mister, not unless you try to move scabs in," Wagner answers him. We like that. This guy White is too uppity. All big shots are.

"The first one of your men that steps on company property *will regret the day he ever learned to walk,"* White snaps at Wagner. With that he turns and walks right through the crowd as though we don't exist any more. When he gets across the street, instead of going back in by the time office, the big gates swing open for him.

And there they are! About a hundred of them, lined up in the gate entrance. Hired agency thugs—the toughest-looking crew I ever saw. All of them with guns. Mean-looking rats, dug up from God knows where. They are lined up, some of them wearing old, battered soft hats pulled low over their eyes. Others wear caps, and a few have tin hats on. They glare across the street at us and finger the triggers of their shotguns. They look as though they want to let loose on us then and there. One I notice in particular—looks like a hill-billy. Tall, scrawny, with a mouth that reaches to his ears, with thin brown tobacco juice stains. He has a mean grin on his wrinkled face. While I stare at him, he leans over on the barrel of his shotgun and squirts tobacco juice in our direction. But they don't yell at us or make any cracks. They stand there. Then two black-uniformed company guards swing the big gates shut. None of us says anything for a moment. That picture across the street doesn't look pretty at all. The company is going to fight.

A few minutes later, smoke begins to pour out of the mill chimneys. It scares us—can there be scabs at work? When did they get in the mill? Then Mills, one of the old-timers, a furnaceman who has been with the company for years, breaks the tension with a chuckling laugh.

"They ain't workin' them furnaces," he tells us, "that's tar paper they're burnin' . . . it's an old trick . . . throws a heavy smoke."

That makes us feel better. The company is bluf-

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fing about having men at work. But behind the gate there are other men, and that's no bluff.

Monday Afternoon, 5 P.M.

Things begin to look a bit brighter. Nothing happened all morning, and the picket lines have been slowly growing. There are about two hundred now, some of them women, wives of the strikers. The company has made no move of any kind. Everything behind the gate is quiet. A few of the guards have taken positions up on the roof of the mill, and we can see their gun-barrels glint in the waning sunlight. We get word from other mills up the line that they will be down to help us picket as soon as they change shift. Workers from the Timken Bearing plants from the south end of town are beginning to drive up in their cars to see how we are making out. They are very friendly. We need all the friends we can get.

So far, we haven't got word from the big shots of the American Federation of Labor. Maybe they'll come and help us, and maybe they won't. They don't like strikes very much; we know that from experience. If they want to help us, well and good. If they want to stay away, good again. Just so long as they don't shove their noses in and try to run things.

One of the newspapermen asks Wagner if we have sanction from the Federation for our strike. Wagner says no, and old Mills, who doesn't like the Federation leaders, tells the reporter, "If we sit around on our tails waitin' for headquarters in Washington to sanction this here strike, we'll have whiskers down to our belly buttons."

He's about right. Our union is a federal local, affiliated directly to the A. F. of L., under the jurisdiction of the Executive Council. They are too busy lobbying and making speeches about the Reds nowadays to sanction any strike.

The reporter writes down what we say, passes around a pack of cigarettes and promises to print things just like we told him. But I know from other strikes I've been in that the papers seem to think that we workers are just natural-born liars and what we say is not worth printing, for fear that their papers won't give the readers nothing but the truth, and the whole truth, so help them.

The early afternoon paper, for instance, has a piece about the strike which gives a statement from the company and not a word about why we are striking. We gave a statement to them after the rally last night. The paper says that the company "anticipates no trouble and expects most of the few employees who have remained away from work back Tuesday morning." Then it goes on to say that the mill is working and a check-up shows that only sixty employees did not report for work. That's a lie. There aren't ten men in that plant. There's not many on the picket line, but they are not working either.

Monday Afternoon, 5:45 P.M.

They are coming by the hundreds to help us. The area around Eleventh and Beldon Streets on up to the mill gate is beginning to fill up with the crowd. Many of them are here in their mill clothes, carrying their lunch pails. Lots of kids home from school are playing on the street and having a swell time. We try to chase them away, in case of trouble, but they refuse to go. A few city cops stand off to themselves, making no attempt to keep the streets open for traffic. A gang of young fellows are pitching pennies; there's a heated game of pinochle on the steps of Peley's restaurant, and Peley himself is doing a booming business inside. A small huddle of Italian strikers are playing their number game; one facing the other, both jabbing their fingers and yelling, "Uno" or "Quattro" or other Italian numbers at each other. They sweat, eyes glistening, heads wagging furiously.

Suddenly, up front, near the gate, there's a commotion. We all stop and look. The gates are slowly opening again. Something like an electric shock runs through the crowd, and we stop whatever we are doing to focus attention on the gate. The police shamble away uneasily and go into the restaurant. The gate suddenly swings wide open, and a low rumbling sound sweeps over the crowd. A big armored truck stands in the gateway, motor idling. It begins to move towards us, slowly at first. The crowd nearest the gate stumble back. Here and there a striker stoops to the ground, for a brick or whatever he can find to throw. The armored truck, a big twenty-tonner, rolls towards us, gathers speed. The crowd backs away, facing the truck. Somebody shouts above the crowd, *"A truck load of scabs—they're taking them home!"*

"Get the rats!" from another voice.

"Let 'em through," from another.

I push up toward the gate to get a better view. It must be scabs, I think, and the company is escorting them home under guard. I see the driver. He's scared stiff, his face pasty grey, and he's glued to the wheel, hunched over. On either side of him, standing on the runningboard, are two thugs, tin hats on, and bandoliers of tear gas bombs swung over their backs. The truck reaches the street. We surge toward it. Some try to push backward, away from it. The whole street is roaring now. Then, one of the guards, growling, swings his sack around, pulls out a tear-gas bomb and lets it fly right into the crowd.

A dull, muffled explosion, a roar of anger, and then a shower of bricks. Pickets try to rush the driver, but the truck gathers speed. More gas bombs fly on all sides, and part of the crowd is completely enveloped with low-rolling clouds of gas. More bricks. More curses. The truck swerves, and one of the thugs crumples up and falls into the driver's cab. By this time, the truck is a half block from the gate.

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The truck pulls halfway down Eleventh Street and without warning stops. We don't expect this —we think they are trying to drive away from the picket-lines. The big doors of the back of the truck fling open . . . and about thirty thugs, armed with sawed-off shot-guns, revolvers, tear-gas guns, jump out, line up facing the crowd quicker than you can think. At a signal from their leader, they begin to blast away right and left. The sudden bellow of the guns is sickening. Gas blinds us.

A tall, skinny picket in greasy overalls beside me suddenly paws his neck as though it's itchy, yawns wearily, and slides to the ground. Then he turns over on his back and starts screaming at the sky. I try to lift him up, but the crowd is stampeding in our direction. I go under a wave of running feet. I leave the skinny guy where he is, stagger to my feet, and start running. I taste blood in my mouth and wonder if I'm shot. People are crouching behind ash cans on the sidewalks. Others, in little squirming knots, are jammed into doorways and store entrances. Everybody is looking for cover. The air hums with the moan of invisible slugs of the shot-guns. A few seconds apart comes a deathly whisper close over our heads—rifle bullets. I reach a corner and turn, half running, half falling.

From the distance, the street up near the mill gate looks as though it's covered with dirty bundles. We count—there's fourteen of them, either dead or wounded. There's no sign of the thugs—the big gate is closed once again. The figures lying on the street remind me of a mess of flies that have been swatted off a wall. Most of them lie motionless. One of them rolls over, tries to rise, halts uncertainly, and then gradually sinks back to the asphalt. Another suddenly stirs, like a man awakening in a hurry, rises, and lurches down the street toward us. We keep watching from where we are, not daring to venture out into the street again, even at this distance. Behind that gate are smoking guns commanding the sweep of the street, still hot from recent firing.

The crowd is muttering, and people are beginning to talk again. Some of the conversation:

"Saw Mike get his face bashed in, then. . . . "

"Couldn't get away in time. . . . "

"Lousy rats didn't give us a chance. . . . "

I see the armored truck standing empty a block up the street. Others have discovered it. A brick comes hurtling out of an alley-way near by, crashes through the windshield of the truck. It stands there like a guilty monster suddenly helpless to escape. In the fighting the driver and its thug cargo deserted it. The crowd is becoming mass-conscious of its presence. It stands for everything we hate intensely at this moment—the company, the gun-thugs, the blood, the sight of those torn human bundles up near the mill. If we can't reach our fallen, we can reach the truck. Somebody says aloud what we are all thinking: "Get that goddamned truck."

A shout goes up. "The truck. Get it!" A young Polack steel worker, oily with sweat, shirt hanging in shreds, leads the way. He runs openly into the street, shouting. Another picket runs out of a doorway. No shots from the gate. We become bolder. Some of us run to the truck, others walk hesitantly. All eyes are toward the gate up the street. No shots yet. A few more run toward the truck. Then we flood out into the streets, from alleys, from side-streets, from behind stoops and ash-cans. We are astounded to see so many still alive.

A police ambulance swerves around a corner, slams on screeching brakes at the sight of the crowd around the armored truck. Someone points up the street toward the wounded—the ambulance continues in that direction. We turn our attention back to the truck. A few of the strikers have gotten into the seat and are furiously swearing because they can't get the motor started. Others are clambering on the roof, trying to rip off the thin sheet-iron that gave protection to the company gunmen against our hail of bricks, only a few moments ago. Then a high, thin voice suddenly organizes the crowd.

"Set fire to it!"

"Get some gas outa the tank . . . sprinkle it on the seat!"

A hundred hands try to get to the gas tank at the same time. In a moment we start to push into each other, in our haste to get away—the truck is on fire. But we no sooner get her burning, when the sound of the fire-engines echoes, off in the distance. There's always a company stool in a crowd; and this one loses no time in phoning the alarm. It doesn't take the firemen long to get to the truck, and it makes us all mad, because she is just beginning to burn nicely. But the firemen, for some particular reason, don't seem to be in a hurry. When they learn that this truck was used to shoot down fourteen of us in cold blood, they sort of lose interest in putting the fire out. They become experts in slow motion and getting in each other's way and in getting the hose all tangled up. We stand around and help by losing their fire-plug wrenches for them; but they don't seem to mind. In fact, I have one in my back pocket, and I swear I saw one of the fire lads eyeing me swipe it; but all he says is: "And now where the hell could that wrench be?"

By this time we all know that the firemen don't want to put the blaze out—and a few of them go around the crowd muttering, "It's a fine howdy'do, callin' union firemen out on a job like this!" It's true: these boys are organized, and they don't like the idea of union men squirting union water on company scab property.

So I go over to one of the lads and say, "Listen, why don't you guys just put this fire out in a hurry

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and then go away from here—you just do your duty and leave."

He looks at me thoughtfully and then grins: "A swell idea—we do our duty and then get the hell out of here!"

He tells a few other firemen, and they like the idea. In fact, wrenches, hoses, and other equipment they couldn't find is suddenly right there.

I take the wrench out of my back pocket and hand it to a little short fireman who is puffing and sweating around me. He takes the wrench and says: "Now where could it a' been all this time?"

The slow motion experts come to life, and in two minutes they have the fire out. A couple of city cops try to take charge as soon as the firemen drive away, but we chase them off.

Then we do a good job on that truck.

About three hundred of us pick her up, like a swarm of ants shoving a crust of bread along a sidewalk, and then we push her right through the railing of the bridge down into the creek. Some bright kid has taken the gas tank cap off, so that when she falls in the creek the gas pours out and surrounds her. Then, a shower of lighted matches hit the creek at the same time and up she goes in flames.

All this time, there's not a sign of the company thugs. The wounded have been picked up by cars and the ambulance. The streets are filling up again. A good sign. It'll take more than bullets to beat us in this strike.

Wednesday, Midnight.

Since Monday morning, the thugs have attacked our picket lines twenty-one times. Each new attack brings us more wounded, but we fight them off each time. The company is getting tired, and the attacks become less and less frequent. There's a rumor around town tonight that there are a lot of strikers with rifles, covering every gate of the plant, ready to let them have a dose of their own medicine. We've got the streets blocked off with barricades made of rocks, chains, and barrels. The whole territory around the mills is jammed with mass picket lines.

The other mills are out with us now; the two big Republic mills walked out to a man, midnight Monday, after they shot us up. Even the wives and children are on the picket lines. No one dares try to keep the women off, because they fight like savages once aroused. A man hasn't got near the courage of a woman—at least, some of the women I've seen in action in this strike. They've threatened to take the first thug they catch, march him through town without a stitch of clothing on, and then give him a beating that he'll never forget. So the thugs have been pretty scarce in showing themselves since the women got into action. If you've ever seen a crowd of women "woman-handle" a man like I've seen in a few strikes, you'll know what I mean.

CROSS-COUNTRY

Wood

I HAD made arrangements to stay for some time in a lumber camp near Tacoma. Driving about sixty miles away from Tacoma, I arrived at the company town at dusk: a large office building and company store, little houses for the married men, larger homes for the purchasing agent and the superintendent, and a long row of bunk houses for the single men. The purchasing agent was hungry, and he drove me toward the office, went inside, and brought me a check for tomorrow's breakfast, yelled once or twice: "Bull cook!" got no answer, told me: "You'll find the bull cook somewhere around, and tell him to give you a bed for the night"; and then the purchasing agent went home to supper. It was getting dark, I walked up and down the porch and smoked cigarettes. I had no idea what a bull cook was, but I yelled the words: "Bull cook!" just like the purchasing agent.

A little fat man appeared. He wore a skull cap on his head, and he asked me what the hell I wanted. I wanted to know if he were the bull cook, and he said: "God damn it, yes!"

I showed him the check and demanded a bed. He took me toward the bunkhouses and opened one door, and said, "You sleep in that bed. Nobody's using it tonight."

The bull cook disappeared. It was night now, and he hadn't even shown me where the wash room was. There were some old newspapers lying in the corner. I took off my clothes and got into bed and read the old newspapers to forget my hunger. Then I tried to sleep.

It was dark yet when the whistle blew and I was told to wait for Number 4. I went out to the track and saw logging trains go by, and then an engine came with a sign, Number 4. I got into the caboose with three other men, and we started for the camps in the mountains. We rode over narrow trestle bridges, past logged-off, burned-off land, and we turned past a spot where I was told a year before an engine had fallen and killed its crew and still lay, red now with rust, past logs that had rolled off the cars and rotted black in the ditches, up to Siding 8. I was to live at Camp 2. It was about twelve railroad cars, with the wheels blocked, off on a spur. There was the time-keeper's—they called him "time-killer's"—car, the mess car, ten bunk cars, and off to one side, the car with curtains in the windows where the waitresses lived. In each bunk car, there were six tiers of bunks and a large table, and a lot of old papers on the table, and two benches and a sink.

I was given a bunk, and then I climbed into the engine cab of a logging train and rode within a mile of where the operations were. Then I was told to walk, and I was glad it was down-hill, because there were no roads in the mountains, nothing but the railroad bed, and the stones were sharp, and I wore city shoes.

The city shoes were the worst part of the stay, because I could scarcely walk in the woods with them on. I stumbled on the stones, and then I tried to walk on the ties, and everywhere I heard axes hitting into wood and was certain I had now arrived and would see men working around a curve. Finally I saw the smoking top of the giant skidder. I saw a section gang working on the grade.

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There were about a hundred men working, flipping the claws of the skyline tight over the logs, watching the great logs suddenly lifted into air, dangling; and then, a lever pushed forward at the track below, the logs rushed down the skyline, down the hill, not like great hulks weighing many tons, but like fragile twigs—hitting a huge tree in the way of the skidline and smashing it out of the way, down, down, where they were lowered at the track, where the loaders' claws seized them, lifted them, dexterously placed them on the railroad cars.

I climbed up the tremendous skidder, the world's largest piece of movable machinery, set on four flat cars, and sat with the operator and watched his hand move forward and, the gesture multiplied a million times by power, a mile up the hill, at the other end of the steelcabled skid line, a log was lifted and began rushing down. The other day the cable had snapped, and like a mile long snake, had twisted below, cutting off whole trees, and killing a man who had been in the way. I watched the loaders riding on the logs, and as these were set down on the cars, the loaders jumped up to avoid the shock.

I left the road bed and carefully stepped on a fallen hemlock and walked down it in my city shoes, nervous that at any moment I would step on a piece of loose bark that, more slippery than a banana peel, would send me flying into the brush. There were over a hundred feet of this log, and then I jumped on a Douglas fir and walked down it; to where I joined the two Bottleson brothers, Big Quart and Little Quart. Little Quart set the head of his axe against an enormous cedar, pointing the way it would fall, hung the oil bottle on, and began knocking off the bark. Big Quart joined him. His axe swung inside of his wrist and hit the naked wood, chipping off a piece. The brothers made the cut—Big Quart and Little Quart, then one and two—even, and so smooth it was almost polished out. On opposite sides they made a hole in the bark and set their shaking stands, stepped on them, set the saw opposite the cut, and swung easily this way and that way and in and out, in elbowed rhythm. They let me try to saw. They told me to exert no effort, to swing the saw as you would swing a baby, as softly; and themselves, they did it, I felt, as tenderly, and one to the other, oiling it constantly. They took the saw out, they set a wedge in the cut; they hit the wedge with a hammer—one, two, three; they lifted the tremendous tree a small bit of an inch; waited. The tiniest crack was heard. They shouted, jumped. The cedar stood still. Then it leaned— like a swan diver, spread itself very slowly down—and fell—crashed—smashed—breaking itself in two. A tree had been in the way; it had snapped off the tree. It had shaken the side of the entire hill.

At four-thirty, they heard Number 110 coming down the grade and knocked off work; Big Quart picked up the lunch boxes and the heavy wedges; Little Quart threw the saw upon his shoulders, making it dance. The bucker had finished sawing a log across and joined the brothers, and together they stepped up hill on the fallen hemlock, walking easily in their calk-bottomed boots.

On the track, the loggers were climbing into the ancient coach, behind Number 110, falling into the plush, torn, oil-filthy seats, staring at the fresh stickers that asked them to join the lumber workers' federation, that had been mysteriously pasted on each glass pane somewhere through the day. They half lay, and steam rose out of their clothes. They were too lazy to light cigarettes.

"Oh, for Mae West," somebody called out.

Everybody smiled.

"Oh, for a turkish bath and a glass of beer."

Slowly they passed the lunchboxes to be piled up forward.

"Look at this damned thing," said one they called San Quentin Joe. "Why can't I get a thermos that doesn't leak? I want some coffee, too."

Somebody suggested: "Throw it out of the window."

"I'd like to," said San Quentin Joe, "throw it the fifteen miles straight down to headquarters, so it will smash against the purchasing agent's head."

"Pipe down, Joe," whispered the other. "I'll bet there's a stool pigeon around."

San Quentin Joe slowly stood in the aisle, turned around and announced in a loud voice: "Listen, stool. I've served time, and I'll serve time again. You tell that purchasing agent if he ever comes to Camp 2, I'll cut his heart out and send it to his mother."

After supper, we went to the bunkhouses, and it seemed to me everything was too quiet. Men lay on their bunks and read magazines. I asked if that was all they did. I was told these were the married men, who had to save their money. Some others were in Bunkhouse 9.

I went to 9. I slid back the door; and there were about twenty men sitting on the bunks, watching, and in the center of the room, on the table covered with a blanket, there was a poker game going on. I joined the game. They were the wildest crew I'd ever played with. It was table stakes, and they thought nothing of putting twenty dollars on an ace in the hole, twenty dollars it had taken them weeks to save, and which they were going to spend on a wild weekend on the Seattle skidroad. Sometimes they won and their imaginations soared, and again they lost and went to sit on the bunks and to watch, forced now to remain in the camp for many weeks to come.

I was returning to my bunkhouse that night, and one of the loggers suggested I go with him. He took me to another car; there, half of the men in camp were listening to a union organizer. And he had not ridden up on trains as I had. There was no transportation for an organizer. He had walked uphill along railroad ties, hiding each time a logging train went by. If the time-keeper found him, he'd have been beaten up. They listened to him urging them to support the federation; and when at 8:45 the lights flickered, warning us that in fifteen minutes all lights would be out, the organizer had the signed slips in his pocket and had disappeared in the mountain night, to somehow find his way back to the road, fifteen miles below.

That was when they worked. The whistle blew at 5:30 in the morning, and shivering, lips trembling with the cold of mountains, they wriggled out of bed and into overalls and sweaters, got their big boots on, and rushed to the mess car for breakfast. They ate enormous breakfasts: fruit and oatmeal and eggs and ham and chops and steak and potatoes and coffee and cake, not just one or two items, but almost all of these—even I, who did nothing but stand around and watch, ate three times as much as I usually ate—and hurried to the coach, all alike, sleepy, sitting in the seats and rolling cigarettes. I could never, just by looking at them, tell what they did; whether they were skilled mechanics operating the locomotive logging crane; or fallers, who almost with an extra sense knew which way to point a giant tree to fall; or just loaders, to be gotten, young and agile-footed, by the hundreds in Seattle and Tacoma streets. The night before, sitting on the top bunks in Bunkhouse 9, swinging their legs in space and tossing obscenities at one another as they

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watched the lucky players at the table, or standing, faces shaved, intently listening to the union organizer, or lying on their own beds trying to forget in an adventure magazine the yearning to be home with family and kids, they had also been alike, all workers—like a crowd of business people returning at six in the evening on the Jersey ferry, row after row of straw hats, white collars, brown oxfords and the evening papers folded to the sporting page, and expressionless faces. These also seemed alike: you could not tell an insurance man from a ledger clerk. But when Number 110 arrived and they jumped off the coach and walked toward the steam engines, fired since 4:30 by the watchmen, as, saws dangling, they stepped on the fallen trees to get down to the places where the tall trees still stood, their resemblance vanished. At work, each man seemed a specialist, and his clothes showed his work. The mechanic was filthy with oil; the loader wore gloves, and the pants of his overalls were rolled up for ease; the fallers showed always sawdust in their seams. When twelve o'clock came, they knocked off for an hour, and each sat in the place he worked and opened his lunch box, then having eaten lay back where he sat and dozed off for a minute, or just looked at the sky. Then back to work until they heard Number 110 coming down the grade.

From Monday till Friday, each day was the same; they cursed the time-keeper and the purchasing agent, they ragged and pestered the bull cook—it almost seemed as if this inoffensive fat man who made their beds and swept their floors, had been put there to deflect their anger at those they really wanted to hate. And I wondered why they hated these men so; why they never spoke of the men in the Tacoma offices without tightening their jaws and narrowing their eyes.

But I saw them also when they didn't work. They had a five-day week, and Friday night the camp would be empty; they would be with their families or dead drunk in a hotel with a two-dollar whore; or they would be laid off, on the skidroad in Tacoma, in Seattle, in Spokane.

I saw these towns at the height of the season, when millions of feet of rough lumber were shipped every day to Japan, to the South Seas, to South America, to Europe; when other millions of feet were cut into planks and made into chairs and sent to every town in the Union; when lumber companies operated at capacities—and still the skidroad in Seattle was black with unemployed loggers; on relief, on the soup line, in shelters. I saw the pitiful dime shows, where not only ancient pictures were shown, but the piano played, and a line of unbeautiful girls, dressed in dirty rompers, kicked their ungraceful legs not very high. And the men didn't watch them. Their eyes were not alive. They slept, or if they didn't sleep, their minds were fogged with hunger, no home, nothing to live for, no tomorrow to expect.

It wasn't the purchasing agent the men hated so much. It was the fact that the pay was small and the week had been shortened to five working days and the season was short, only a few months, and there were too many loggers for the work to be done and there was no other work to be done; and they hated the fact that for the moment they were working, were eating, were sleeping in beds; but soon, as inexorably as death, a notice would come from the Tacoma office through the purchasing agent, through the timekeeper, that the season was ended, that they were to be laid off, that they had better prepare for the Seattle skidroad.

NATHAN ASCH

THEATRE CHRONICLE

I THINK that Ignazio Silone's *Fontamara*—along with works like Malraux's *Man's Fate* and Celine's *Journey to the End of Night*—is one of the most important European novels to be translated during these last few years. Both in his novel, and in *Mr. Aristotle,* a volume of short stories, Silone has written of the more backward sections of the Italian peasantry. He has conveyed a sense of the lives, the consciousness, the wit of these people. Additionally he has unfolded how they become the pawns of a social system, and this he does without violating the sense of character and of the human destinies that he is describing. There are few books that I know of which can rival *Fontamara* for the picture of Fascism at work that it contains. It is quite convincingly a presentation of a section of Mussolini's Italy. Also, it includes a description of black shirts that cries aloud for quotation: "Some of these men in black shirts . . . they had been obliged to come out at night to keep their courage up. Most of them were stinking with wine and if you looked at them from close to, right square in their eyes, they could not face your gaze. They were poor men too. But they were a special class of the poor, without land, with no trade or with many trades—which is the same thing—all rebels against hard work. . . . Too feeble and cowardly to rebel against the wealthy and those in authority, they preferred to serve them, so as to have free license to rob and oppress other poor people, farmers, squatters and little landholders. When encountered by day on the street they were humble and obsequious; in a gang at night they were malicious and bad. They had always been at the beck of the man on top and they always would be. But their enrollment in a special army with special insignia and a special brand of weapons was a novelty of the last few years.

"These are the so-called fascisti."

The Theatre Union presented, as its final offering of the season, Mr. Victor Wolfson's dramatization of *Fontamara* under the title of *Bitter Stream.* The play follows essentially the same pattern as the novel and one summary suffices for both works.

The Fontamarans are peasants who have always been burdened by taxes, exploited by landlords, forced to live on a subsistence level. Previously however, they have had one hope—the possibility of emigration. New restrictions and the advent of Fascism have robbel them of all hope of escape and betterment. In addition their taxes have been so increased that there is almost nothing else of theirs left to be taxed. A new Promoter has come into the section of the country. *In the national interest,* he is grabbing up everything, not only from the poor Fontamarans, but also from the rich.

The Fontamarans revolt. One of their number is Viola Berardo, landless and leader of the younger elements of the community. He meets the Unknown Hand, a leader and agitator of the underground revolutionary movement. While both of them are in jail, the Unknown Hand explains the purposes and the aims of the movement. Viola confesses that he is the Unknown Hand, and the real agitator goes free to continue his work. Inspired by Viola Berardo's example and martyrdom, the Fontamarans issue a newspaper for farmers

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to tell what is happening to them. In the novel, one issue of the paper is written, and truckloads of Fascisti descend upon Fontamara, murdering all they catch, and driving the others into the mountains. In the play, the curtain comes down as the paper is being written.

Silone here depends for his major effects upon an irony that is both delightful and cutting. In the drama, the irony is reduced to a minor key. The bulk of the novel deals with the life of the Fontamarans, their humor, their interests, their economic and social position, and behind this, with the unfolding of how Fascism works upon their lives as a process. Fascism, as a process, is thus the basis of the novel. Mr. Wolfson has shifted the emphasis somewhat in his adaptation. It centers around the agitator or Unknown Hand. Thus, the play is developed in terms of the familiar Theatre Union *lift* pattern, and in his final scene, he rings down the curtain with the usual Theatre Union *lift* ending. In so doing, he has concluded his play on a note of needless anti-climax. The previous scene has presented Viola in jail. The Unknown Hand has been set free because of Viola's spurious confession. Suffering under torture, Viola sends words that he is prepared to tell everything. When an investigator comes, handing Viola a copy of an underground paper which has just been received Viola sees his name in print, and reads aloud: "VIVA VIOLA BERARDO!" He does not confess. Here is the ending of the play. It contains genuine lift. The scene following this in the play is obvious reiteration. In the novel, where the emphasis is different, it has weight.

Despite such efforts to attain the characteristic *lift* pattern, *Bitter Stream* and *Fontamara* supplement one another. Taken together, they provide an unmistakable sense of Fascism, and of its working out in terms of human destinies. Both have wit, humor, drama. Once *Bitter Stream* got under way—after the first two scenes which were crude—it became a genuine and an exciting experience.

The Brooklyn Progressive Players in their first effort toward the establishment of a theatre in Brooklyn, presented *Blood on the Moon,* a play about Nazi Germany by Claire and Paul Sifton. The general construction of incidents in the play is carefully thought out, built together, and rich in dramatic possibilities. It is the story of a middle class family that is one sixth Jewish, and the action begins on the day that Hitler becomes Chancellor. All members of the family are representative of what is best in the German middle class. The father is one of the most famous surgeons in Germany. The mother is an intelligent woman, devoted to her home and her children. One son is a talented young pianist and also a Communist. The other is a keen student who promises to follow in his father's footsteps. The daughter is a beautiful and healthy girl of the type that should bear fine sons. She is in love with a Nazi Storm Trooper who compensates for his intellectual vacuity by the splendor of his physique.

The Nazi campaign of anti-Semitism wrecks the career of every member of the family. The father is stripped of his position, and his ability to practice his science. The pianist son is first forcibly prevented from giving his first concert, and then he is carted off to a concentration camp because he is a Marxist. The other son is beaten up and driven out of the University. The daughter is placed in the third classification of females—those who may marry but must not bear children. Her marriage is ruined. The mother being of pure German stock, is terrorized with threats. Finally, in order to save her youngest son and permit him to get to Switzerland where he may continue his education, she leaves the father, and plans to divorce him.

One important point must be made anent the general theme. It obviously intends to reveal the sheer idiocy and brutality of Nazi theories of race. It succeeds in its intention. However, nearly every character complains of his fate because he or she is being tortured as Jews when they are only a sixth part Jewish. Such complaints are true to character, and do not violate the play; however, it is necessary to suggest that these are, at best, only superficial arguments against the Nazi theories of race. The characters are middle class. They love Germany. They consider themselves Germans. They are anxious for the continuance of the Germany they have known—and that is the Germany of the Weimar Republic. The basic contrasts in the play are, then, contrasts between Fascism, and the liberal bourgeois democracy, a counterposition of Fascism and the attitudes of the liberal sections of the bourgeoisie. This demands to be stated so that the meaning of the play be made clear. There is no objection to such a counterposition *per se,* and the Siftons have made it consistent to character and situation.

Blood on the Moon is sincere and well thought out in its general structure of relationships between character and character, and character and situation. In various scenes, when one after another of the characters is trapped, the situations are ones of great dramatic possibility. Also, though it is played to some extent by non-professionals, the playing is satisfactory, particularly in the interpretation of the role of the daughter.

Yet with all its laudable intentions, there is something seriously wrong with the play. The authors seem convinced of the notion that there is only one way in which a character in a drama can face and meet catastrophe—by a long speech. The only dramatist I know of who could portray tragedy by *long speeches* was Shakespeare, and he was not always successful at it. Further, the long speeches in *Blood on the Moon* are directed at the audience. Their internal and integral meaning in the play is made secondary to this appeal across the floodlights. Successively, dramatic possibilities are ruined by speeches. The Storm Trooper makes one when he tells the daughter that they cannot have children. The dramatic situation is lost. The pianist makes a longer speech when the Storm Trooper comes to arrest him; the impact of the scene is destroyed by a surplusage of words on brotherhood and handshaking. In the final act, the family is being broken up. The mother is leaving. The father is driven to his knees out of desperation and despair. There is a long prayer. Here the Siftons have ineptly spoiled what could have been one of the most beautiful moments seen on a stage in many a season. The father is a scientist. If we could have seen him driven to his knees to pray, when no prayers could come, the authors would have achieved what they meant to achieve; by their lengthy prayer, they produced boredom.

Blood on the Moon woefully requires a blue pencil and a pair of scissors. If it is again produced, and the speeches are cut and the writing sharpened up, it can be a most moving drama.

The only possible interpretation of *Macbeth* which I can accept is the classical one. It views Macbeth as the victim of ambition. Lacking the necessary firmness of purpose to

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follow through his ambitious course, his wife provides the hardness of purpose and fiendish resoluteness. Lady Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's profoundest characterizations, recognized the lack of iron in her husband's will power, and in her first appearance, she gives expression to her determination to supply that quality. Once started on the path of murder that leads to kingship, he cannot return. He must wade and slough on through blood. His ending is inevitable. *Macbeth,* interpreted in this light, is, in my opinion, perhaps, the greatest drama ever written.

Mr. Orson Welles' production of *Macbeth* in the Negro branch of the Federal Theatre interprets Macbeth as the victim of supernatural forces. The witches become the driving factor in the play, rather than Lady Macbeth. Such a presentation of *Macbeth* must of necessity be ruinous because it reduces all the important and beautiful lines of the drama to the degree where they become little more than incidental exercises in elocution. In contrast, the witches' lines are blown up.

I do not perceive how this production of *Macbeth* can be called Shakespeare, except by courtesy. It is rather, a curious combination of lines and names from Shakespeare, with suggestions of voodism, night clubs, Hall Johnson, *The Emperor Jones,* and perhaps a dash of *Porgy.* Like Marc Connolly's *Green Pastures,* the production impresses me as being too much a white man's impression and interpretation of the consciousness of the Negro. Naivete and sophistication are sewn together in such a way that the seams stick out. The production is turned into an excuse for the almost voodistic elaborations of the witches' scenes on the one hand, and for a lavish display of color and pageantry on the other. The values of the production are those of a spectacle, and not of a drama. The first scene, where Macbeth meets the witches, is elaborated and sets the tone of those that follow. And these are a succession of spectacles, with interlardings of those parts of the play which are important. These latter then become a kind of necessary inconvenience. All those speeches on which the drama hinges, those lines which bring out character, are thrown away. Hence, one does not see Shakespeare; one views a pageant. To defend Mr. Welles' pageant on the ground that it is Shakespeare because the actors wear period costumes is to be guilty of unspeakable superficiality. Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* is not a great play just because when it was presented in America, Juno wore the kind of trousers a Dublin Irishman would wear. *Macbeth* is important and great because of its profound characterizations. These were not to be found in Mr. Welles' version.

I do not in the least question the value that can accrue to American culture from the development of a Negro Theatre. However, I do not see where we aid the development of such a theatre by praising this production for the wrong reasons. If this production with all its supernaturalism, with all its confusion of the meaning of *Macbeth* be presented as Shakespeare, how then is one ever going to appreciate the real and the fundamental values and significance of what is, probably, Shakespeare's greatest drama? I frankly think that Mr. Welles could have produced something with the same spectacle-values without doing it by debilitating *Macbeth.* As it is, too many have been allowed to get a mixed sense of Shakespeare and of a pageant. I am convinced that if this kind of confusion had been avoided, the Negro Theatre would have been started on a sounder footing.

JAMES T. FARRELL

BOOKS

A Minor Strain

A FURTHER RANGE, *by Robert Frost. New York: Henry Holt and Co. $2.50.*

One of the commonplaces about Robert Frost's work as a poet is that it renders so precisely and so fully the true essence of the New England spirit. Maybe it does, but surely that depends on what you mean by the phrase. Like all commonplaces, this one is compounded of truth and falsity in confusingly unequal proportions. There certainly is and, at least subterraneously, always has been a New England of which Frost's books are an authentic expression, and in the last two or three generations that New England has been peculiarly evident to the literary mind. It is the New England of nasalized negations, monosyllabic uncertainties, and non-committal rejoinders; the New England of abandoned farms and disappointed expectations, of walls that need mending and minds that need invigoration, of skepticism and resignation and retreat. How well one knows it!—that New England of so many unpainted farm-houses and so many frost-bitten villages and so many arid sitting-rooms. Yes, there is no denying that it exists.

It exists, and Robert Frost is its laureate. He has, at his best, the easiest and the truest touch a poet could have, and more than once he has found the perfect metaphor and the perfect cadence for that Yankee renunciation which, whatever else it is, is certainly what the Buddhists would call his own *dharma.* Everyone remembers the poem about the oven bird:

> *The question that he frames in all but words*
> *Is what to make of a diminished thing.*

Everyone remembers the poem about the bird at nightfall:

> *At most he thinks or twitters softly, "Safe!*
> *Now let the night be dark for all of me.*
> *Let the night be too dark for me to see*
> *Into the future. Let what will be, be."*

And—since no one expects that, even in a day when this philosophy seems as profitless as a dried-up well, Robert Frost will change his tune—everyone will be prepared to find the sentiment recurring, as it does more and more quaveringly, in this sixth volume of his. One of the metaphors now is that of clouds breaking, on a stormy night, in a not very starry patch of the heavens:

> *Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed,*
> *"Where, where in Heaven am I? But don't tell me!"*
> *I warned the clouds, "by opening on me wide.*
> *Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me."*

No doubt that is the way many people in New England, both plain men and intellectuals, have often felt, though certainly not, for the most part, very articulately. But it is not the way the Vermont marble workers seem to feel; it is not the way Roger Baldwin acts as if he felt; and it is very far from being, in any absolute sense, the true essence of the New England spirit. On the contrary, it is expressive much more of the minor than of the major strain in Yankee life and culture; or of a strain that perhaps seemed almost the major one in a late, transitory, and already superseded period. Phillips and John Brown and Emerson and Ripley were quite as true New Englanders as Hawthorne and

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Emily Dickinson and Henry Adams: militancy, positiveness, conviction, struggle—such things have had a long and characteristic history in New England; they very evidently have as much life in them now as they ever had, and they are what Robert Frost has never succeeded—has, indeed, never wished to succeed—in expressing.

That, of course, was not his call as a poet, and though to say this does qualify, it does not minimize his admirable achievement. But it perhaps accounts for the disappointment one feels in reading these later poems collected in *A Further Range*. A writer naturally pays a price for committing himself to a point of view, and the price Frost has paid for cultivating a fruitless and rather complacent skepticism is apparently signalized by the gradual loss of the warmth and freshness of his early books and the relative dryness, emptiness, caprice, and even banality of some of the present poems. The best of them—a dozen, perhaps—are such as no other American poet could write. Most of them are pinched and poor in feeling and intellectually commonplace. Not much is added to the general fund of wisdom by the poem about the monkeys and the burning-glass, which ends with the line: "It's knowing what to do with things that counts." And surely a thousand minor poets could have told us what Frost tells us in the last stanza of "Two Tramps in Mud Time":

Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

Of such oracularities the worst one can say is that they will do no active harm: elsewhere in this volume one catches glimpses of the potential destructiveness in a way of thinking that might seem merely sterile. As Tityrus—in "Build Soil —A Political Pastoral"—Frost represents himself as explaining to his interlocutor, Meliboeus, the potato man, that bad as the times may be, they are by no means bad enough to justify a poet in taking sides in political or social conflicts:

Life [he says] may be tragically bad, and I
Make bold to sing it so, but do I dare
Name names and tell you who by name is wicked?

The answer is that Frost, with the splendid inconsistency of a systematic irrationalist, does dare to name names, and that like all professed non-partisans, he betrays his real animus when he names them. The potato man has asked him whether he thinks socialism is the thing needed, and Tityrus-Frost has answered that there is no such thing as "socialism pure":

There's only democratic socialism,
Monarchic socialism—oligarchic,
The last being what they seem to have in Russia

In these lines an old—and I should say a rather violent—bias reasserts itself. Remember the title poem of *New Hampshire*:

If well it is with Russia, then feel free
To say so or be stood against the wall
And shot. It's Pollyanna now or death.

From the poet whose ostensible refusal to take sides has resulted in complete silence on the savageries of Fascism in Italy, Germany, and elsewhere, I submit that these expressions come with something less than the best grace in the world.

On the jacket of this volume the publishers quote Mr. Mark Van Doren as saying that Frost's place "is and always has been singularly central." A less happy way of defining his distinction, it seems to me, could hardly be hit upon. His place has always been and still is on the sandy and melancholy fringes of our actual life, and his poetry derives its special, its estimable cachet, as well as its limitations, from that very fact.

NEWTON ARVIN

The Education of John Reed

JOHN REED, *by Granville Hicks, with the assistance of John Stuart. The Macmillan Company. International Publishers edition.* $2.50.

John Reed emerged from the avant-guard movement in art and literature which began in America around 1912. He was of the generation of T. S. Eliot, Waldo Frank, Alfred Kreymborg; and as a Harvard graduate and as a young popular news-correspondent with a leaning towards poetry his path turned frequently in the direction of the salon-bohemian crowd, the Mabel Dodges, Van Vechtens, Drapers.

In those days an insurgent movement had begun among the American intellectuals against the conventions of American morality, the dullness of the middle-class home, and the lifelessness of commercialized literature. It was the opening of the era of the Little Revolt—Little Magazines, Little Theatres, "Studios". This movement, though lacking in historical self-consciousness and making little effort to analyze and define its premises, had a definite ideology, brought to remarkable homogeneity by the conditions and personalities instigating it and dominating its growth. By no means did it constitute merely a literary school; it was the anarchistic psychological shadow of an active liberal reformism, based in turn upon the energetic and aimless well-being of the middle class. The insurgents took a destructive position with respect to the arid value-systems of American life, and set up against these systems the image of the free, "creative" individual. As John Reed put it in the program he wrote for the *Masses* in 1913: "We refuse to commit ourselves to any course of action except this: to do with the *Masses* exactly what we please. . . . We have perfect faith that there exists in America a wide public, alert, alive, bored with the smug procession of magazine platitudes, to whom What We Please will be as a fresh wind. . . . The broad purpose of the *Masses* is a social one: to everlastingly attack old systems, old morals, old prejudices . . . and to set up new ones in their places . . ." But what were the new systems, morals and prejudices to be? "We will be bound by no one creed or theory of social reform, but will express them all, providing they be radical. . . . Sensitive to all new winds that blow, never rigid in a single view or phase of life, such is our ideal for the *Masses*."

The radical element, then, both literary and social, was pure liveliness—action or appearance colorful enough to overcome dullness. The hideous America composed of meaningless moral restraints, church-gatherings, business-men's lodges, academic honors, vapid political cliches, the bourgeois revoltés tried to replace with a world made up of distinctive personalities each of whom was a limitless world in himself. In conceiving the dissolution of bourgeois social organization in all its forms, the bohemians came to regard the world as a vast hangout or sanatorium in which certain guests were "interesting" and the rest intruders of no consequence. The interesting people were recognizable by their uniqueness, color, originality, Life—and primarily, by their

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capacity to "understand" each other. Mabel Dodge, Gertrude Stein, Muriel Draper, each had their own infallible method of spotting a "genius." And, of course, there was no other kind of knowledge than this Personal Touch, sublimated elsewhere as Intuition, Organic Wholeness, or Creative Insight.

There seems little doubt that when John Reed first became involved in the struggles of the working class through his participation in the Paterson strike, his motives were characteristic of his group: admiration for the striking personality of Big Bill Haywood, the attraction of a new type of activity, antipathy for the police—while for the silk workers there was sympathy, the kind of sympathy by which one adds to his sense of the richness of his own personality, a sympathy supported moreover by the exoticism of poverty, foreign faces and speech, the exhilaration of mass sorrow and enthusiasm. Even the thoroughness of his absorption in the strike, when for three weeks "he worked at nothing else, sleeping little and then with his clothes on," could have been little more than a successful psychological *tour de force* of self-projection, similar to those ecstasies of abandonment cultivated by other thrill-seeking devotees of the What We Please philosophy. Before the strike was over, he was already in Europe, whence, in the chateaux of the skilled hunters of Life's Whole Animal, he could write: "I am not a Socialist temperamentally, any more than I'm an Episcopalian. I know now that my business is to interpret and live Life, wherever it may be found—whether in the labor movement or out of it." The sectarians of Life, battling in dead earnest against every form of purpose and responsibility not related to the immediate oscillations of temperament, were forever prepared to reject all external loyalties as sectarian, as "too serious", "too narrow".

At a critical period in his life, however, Reed had the exceptional good fortune to have a great education thrust upon him, and he proved capable, in spite of his generation, of receiving it. This education had to be tendered to him in a very special form: it could not consist of a theory or a system of ideas. Reed, like his contemporaries, the backwash of whose influence can still be felt today, was, at first, programmatically and emotionally anti-intellectual, distrustful and resentful towards generalization. But his job as correspondent, which carried him into Villa's peon army, into the trenches of many fronts in the World War, and finally into the midst of the vastest event of the modern world, the Bolshevik seizure of power in October, instructed him in the one manner in which knowledge was open to him. He began to discover meanings, where they lay embedded in events themselves; he learned to discriminate between adventures, between the merely colorful and the historically significant; and having beheld in the unfolding of the daring October days, a drama bursting with reason and conscious preparation, he comprehended, once and for all, that the world he lived in was not a world of personalities, but a world of forces, and that understanding takes place not through a sense of rhythm or personal touch, but that it is made ready by a study of the Marxist analysis of history. Thus his celebrated volume on the *Ten Days That Shook The World* became a sober and well-documented report, unsentimental and purposeful, possessing a discipline and intelligence in which there is not the slightest trace of "attitude".

With this education Reed moved out of the current of the American literary movement of 20 years ago. The final period of his brief life was devoted mainly to organizational work, speeches on labor and political subjects, and controversial articles. Many of his former friends now brought against him the double accusation, that he could not be serious in his new role, and that he had lost his sense of humor. But, whereas, in 1912 he had dedicated his Day in Bohemia to Steffens in the true mystic-clique style, addressing him as "one of us; the only man who understands my arguments," now in the days of war-hysteria, repressions and analysis he was no longer affected by Steffens' paternalistic counsel: "You can't plant ideas. Only feelings exist. I think it is undemocratic to try to do much now." There were now thousands who understood Reed's arguments.

Under the influence of the triumph of the October revolution and the organization of power, Reed stepped clear of the anti-conventional thrill-movement in American thought towards a dramatic conception of revolutionary history and theory. And when the world of personalities was transformed into a world of historical forces, then it was no longer a question of sympathy for the working class but of identification with it in its historic role. Retaining from his past an independence of thought and a demand for concreteness, Reed found Marxist principles as something visible inside the facts of the modern world; he could not take them from books alone; but at the same time he studied and investigated so as to be able to see more. As he wrote to Upton Sinclair: "I know it is the facts I tell you that you do not believe; and I must be content to wait for history. But I know that I am right. I have not dreamed but have studied and investigated as I never did before. . . ." Thus it is in line with the experience of John Reed that the intellectual life of America is passing into its next stage.

Secure in the significance of its subject, Granville Hicks' persuasive study of the life and development of John Reed makes no effort either to diminish his falterings or to puff up his accomplishments. It is a fast-moving, broad-regioned story, good to read and rich in information. In a completely effortless way, Hicks causes to appear an absorbing background sketch of the history of the period. He performs gracefully the difficult task of presenting the many-passioned Reed as a consistently developing type.

There is but one aspect to which more effort could have been devoted—a Marxian analysis of the ideological background of Reed's motives. The crises occurring in a conscious man during such profound changes of orientation as Reed experienced can reveal the hopes and fears of a whole epoch, a whole tradition. The fact that Reed was not a theorist and reached his decisions with a high degree of spontaneity makes the problem of analysis more complex and difficult; yet certain theories did reach a climax and a turning point in his experience. The question concerning Reed's development is the question of the relation of the American intellectual tradition which produced him to revolutionary history and Marxian analysis. The existence of this question and the need to elaborate it is suggested in the rather absurd notation quoted from Clare Sheridan's diary regarding Reed's activities in Moscow as a member of the E.C.C.I.: "I understand the Russian spirit, but what strange force impels an apparently normal young man from the U. S.?"

HAROLD ROSENBERG

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Regional Stories

HEAD O' W-HOLLOW, *by Jesse Stuart. E. P. Dutton & Co. $2.50.*

Head O' W-Hollow is Jesse Stuart's second book. It covers the same Kentucky ground and people found in his earlier, *Man With a Bull Tongue Plow.*

Man With a Bull Tongue Plow consisted of seven hundred and three sonnets. The poet, a one-horse farmer, sang at the plow of his loves, of the seasons, of winter "releasing his high mortgage on the weather," of hunters ripping the guts of the cornered rabbit. Scattered among the descriptions of nature were a series of thumbnail sketches of his neighbors —mountaineers, merchants, politicians, all sorts of folk in the Kentucky mountain valley where Stuart has lived most of his life.

In spite of its novelty and virility, *Man With a Bull Tongue Plow* was not as successful a book as *Head O' W-Hollow.* The sonnets were loose, irregular, repetitious. Few of them had the inevitability and finish which mark poetry of a high quality. The writer, wrestling with the sonnet form, too often involved the reader in his struggles. Too often the verse showed the groping and the sparks thrown off by a vigorous talent sharpening its share to get a firmer hold in his soil and people.

The second book by Stuart shows a remarkable advance. The stories show a happier marriage of content and style than the poetry. It is true that at times as in "The Death of Battle Keaton," the prose becomes too lyrical, choking the stream of the action. Where metaphors should be illuminative, they are merely decorative. As a whole, however, the prose is more original, more pointed. The reader is swung into the mood and atmosphere of the story with the first sentence. Stuart's prose is a far better medium than his verse for giving us his particular experiences of life in the Kentucky backwoods.

The short stories cover the same ground and people dug up by the bull tongue plow, but they go much deeper. The thumbnail sketches of the sonnets have trained the writer for the full canvas. The writer is not content like the typical regionalist to describe the quaint customs, the poetic speech, the color of his people. He creates characters. He peoples his book with innumerable men and women whose twang, humor, hustle and struggle remain with the reader long after the book is closed. We come to know these people as well as we know the little Jewish tailor or the militant seaman battling scabs and police on the New York docks.

Stuart was not blind to social injustice in his first book. He had no kind word then for the "merchant men, the politicians, and the preachers who rise like maggots in a dead hen." He could understand the exploited Hog Mullins "who put the tree line back, built furnaces and made steel, spikes for the tea-rails and slabs of rail cars."

This growing awareness of the social struggle is the driving axle behind several of the short stories. "Mountain Poorhouse" is an unforgettable picture of fifteen helpless "whores, outlaws, and killers," farmed out to a ginwhacking scoundrel who keeps them in a cowshed for $2.30 a week paid him by the county. "Accidental Death" relates how Boss Man Oliver, head of a white section gang, kills an unemployed Negro squatting on a coal heap by firing "a turnip of a cinder" at him. The coroner declares the death accidental. "Dark Winter" gives the story of a poor farm family, caught between the stones. The mother, heavy with child, and her ten-year old boy run the farm while the father lies all winter long at death's door. This simple beautiful story is the finest piece in the whole collection.

Both of Stuart's books indicate that here is a writer with oakroots in the ground. Here is a writer who lives the life of his people, who knows them all—the Senators Foulfoot, the Forty-Gallon Baptists, the farmers, the merchants, the feudists, the whores and saints. He feels at home with them as too few revolutionary writers do. He knows that there is a greater ferment going on in the world than that found in a "jug of herbs." His stories show a greater mastery of form and content. If he continues working over his craft and growing fists "big enough to fight my own battle" as an artist and a man, we shall have in Jesse Stuart one of the most vigorous and able young writers today in America.

BEN FIELD

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors:

Substantially Sydney Justin Harris' *Letter from Chicago* conveyed an adequate picture of the cultural status of the Windy City. However, there were a few hues in his picture which are a bit questionable. And there were a few lacks also. For instance, Harris failed to sketch, no matter how lightly, many hopeful tones, the absence of which throws his picture out of balance.

There are young writers and artists in Chicago who stand clear of the mire he paints. There are left-wing theatre groups doing fairly good work in spite of the Kelly-Hearst-Tribune-Poetry-Esquire-Daily News-University atmosphere. Some of these counter-tendencies are as yet raw, green, and in a certain sense ineffective. But if there is any hope for a vital and well-knit cultural life in Chicago, it is coming from their direction.

The second exception I take with Harris is his inclusion of Meyer Levin in his dismal gallery. The case against Chicago is bad enough without dragging in the innocent for crucifixion. Levin is a member of the League of American Writers, an organization which commits its members to a struggle through their crafts against war, against Fascism, for the protection of national minority groups, and for the preservation of culture. As a member of the League of American Writers, I am glad that Levin is with us. He has been active in the left-wing theatre movement in Chicago, and has given his staunch support in the fight against censorship. Harris overlooks entirely the fact that Levin's play *Model Tenement,* which deals with a rent strike, was barred as "Red" by the same Kelly administration that closed *Tobacco Road.*

May I suggest that a more intimate acquaintance on the part of Harris with what few forces there are in Chicago working toward progressive cultural ends might help to change his doleful picture? The truth of the matter is, some of the things are much blacker than Harris paints. Most of the young artists and writers with a tinge of talent flee this city as if it were on fire. But this, of course, does not help to solve the problem.

The job is a big one; it is nothing less than the task of building our own organs of expression, mobilizing our own audiences, maintaining our own critical standards, and nursing and developing our own talent. And the beginning of such a movement has already started.

RICHARD WRIGHT

Chicago.

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